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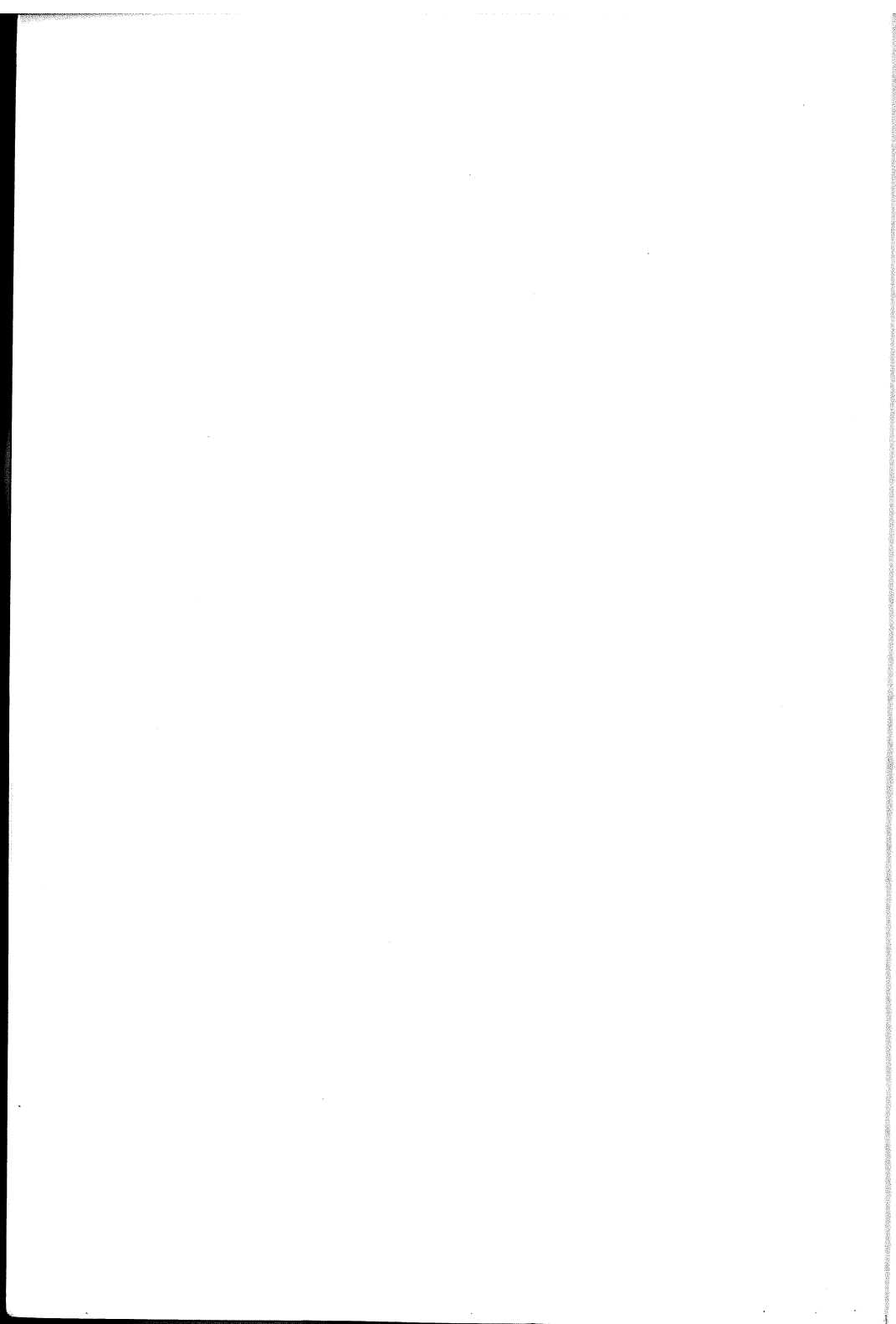
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# The Pacific Journal of Theology

## Journal of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS)

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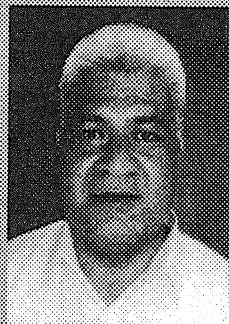
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## Editorial

Our ancestors were gifted with expertise to sail our Pacific Ocean in both good and bad weathers, a reality that deservedly earned them the title 'sea-faring people'. From experience, they knew that nature controls the weather and landscapes. Being capable of forecasting how and when the weather would change allowed them to manoeuvre their canoes around reefs and through shallows. When the clouds swirled and broke up restlessly, they considered it a sure sign of a storm on the horizon. When the moon was high, they knew it was low tide. The distinctive cries of the birds during the night or day, the altitude they flew at and the direction they went indicated that land was near or there was a shoal of fish in the vicinity. The stars in the sky at night and the flow of the currents during the day were their celestial charts from one island to the next. Indeed, their training and inspiration were from nature itself. What one generation learnt was handed down as tradition to the next. The next generation would either accept such traditions or modify them, or even adapt and adopt new ones, thus always enhancing the old before passing them on to the next generation. In other words, traditions were not static, but could be modified to suit changing circumstances and needs.

Although our ancestors had such knowledge and



**Rev. Dr. Tevita K. Havea**

*Tevita, a native of Tonga is a fourth generation ordained minister of the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga. He is the fifth of seven children of the late Rev. Dr. Sione Amanaki Havea and Etina F. Havea. He is married to Sela Kakaka. Tevita was educated in Tonga and Fiji before he went overseas for further studies where he received a BA from Texas Wesleyan College (1981), M.Div and M.T.S. from Perkins School of Theology (1985 and 1987), and a Ph.D. from Sheffield University, England (2003). Between 1985 and 1995, he was the Greek New Testament lecturer at Sia'atoutai Theological College in Tonga and now a lecturer in New Testament and Head of the Department of Biblical Studies at Pacific Theological College, Suva, Fiji*



expertise, nature remained at times highly unpredictable and could indeed be hazardous to anyone in the open sea. As much as these intrepid sailors wanted to avoid storms and tragedies, nature most often had its own way and some trips ran into problems.

Scattered throughout the Pacific Ocean are both inhabited and uninhabited islands. A journey in danger in the open sea would first and foremost seek shelter in the closest island to wait out the storm there until conditions were right to continue with their expedition. This was all right when a troubled voyage landed on an inhabited island, for there were people to render them assistance. There were times, however, when such troubled journeys landed on uninhabited islands. Surprisingly, when that happened, stranded sailors would easily discover root crops such as *dalo* (taro), tapioca, yams and coconuts to satisfy their hunger and thirst. If they needed to repair their vessel, they would also find suitable materials available in the islands.

These are signs that they were not the first ones to land in that island; there were others before them, and most certainly there will be others after them. Why is it that in these inhabited islands, provisions were accessible for stranded sailors?

Each time a group of stranded sailors landed in such islands, before they departed they would make sure they planted (back) some root crops, a few coconuts, and if they had left over firewood, they would store that in a safe and dry place. Stones used for their '*umu* or *lovo* (earthen oven) would be stored in a place easy to be found. If the storm had blown down a breadfruit or a mango tree, they would re-plant it. They would also leave marks and directions to these valuable resources, such as planting a row of coconuts to lead to a shelter or cave, or laying out uniformly-sized stones as a guide to where a source of fresh water gurgled. This became a custom of the travellers and that is why stranded voyagers survived when they landed in these islands. Interestingly, our ancestors did this not for themselves, but for others. They did not plant *dalo* and cassava with the hope of harvesting them later for themselves. Rather, they planted *dalo* and left signs for the benefit of others who would arrive in the future.



Having these uninhabited islands scattered throughout our ocean was a blessing for our ancestors. Landing on them because of bad weather was a chance to re-plant and restock the resources for the future travellers who would use them. It would have been a very dangerous thing for the survival of our people if anyone, a stranded traveller himself or herself, thought that he or she had sole ownership of such islands and thus, prohibited others from landing on them. Furthermore, it would have been very ignorant for a person to think that he or she was the last one who would land in such islands.

This issue of the journal contains articles that clearly show that there have, before them, been others doing what they are talking about and that there will be others in the future to improve on the results of their meditation. These articles make use of prior plantings in these 'lands', and likewise they hope to offer something useful for the future. The contributors to this issue are not only making use of the resources already planted in our journal, but are also planting *dalo* and tapioca offering resources of life for our future generations. It is for that reason that I wish to acknowledge the enormous contribution of this issue to the prosperity of our Pacific theological reflection and our common ministry towards peace and unity in the Pacific.

Tevita Tonga Mohenoa Puloka, in 'Freedom of Options (Choices) on Traditional Systems', uses the analogy of the ship's anchor—that indispensable part of the ship that either keeps the ship in a stable position or allows it to move forward—to refer to the meaning and functions of tradition in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. After visiting the full apparatus of the church, such as its basic structure, polity, and theological and mission statements, Puloka examines the church's position in light of modern developments in genetic engineering and human cloning. Challenges to some traditional elements of the Wesleyan heritage, which he presents as being in need of changing, are offered as a way forward for the church. The anchor must be pulled up on these issues, for the church to move forward.

Ma'afu'o tu'itonga Palu re-visits an old hermeneutical question

concerning the bridging of the gaps—occasioned by space, time and culture—between the text and the readers. In 'Contextualisation as Bridging the Hermeneutical Gap: Some Biblical Paradigms', Palu argues that the departure point for theological reflection is not from 'outside' the biblical text, but from the text itself.

In 'Religion and Secularisation: A Tongan Perspective', Sioli Kavafolau reckons that in Tonga, and particularly in the Siasi Uesiliana Tau'atina of Tonga, the validity of the secularisation theory is neither quite realised nor verified. Factors contributing to this outcome include the lack of raw materials in Tonga, the ineffectiveness of globalism to invade the local culture completely, the lack of fixed resources that bring unity and community to the people, and the way they do theology, i.e., contextualisation.

Aisake Casimira's probing on 'A Religion Factor in the Causes and Consequences of Conflict' asks why it is that what we may term 'the religion factor' has suddenly emerged as a major impetus in violent conflicts around the world today. It is because of the fundamental importance of religion, which explains who we are and why, and the meaning of events that happen around us. Casimira argues that religion is as much a factor in conflict as it is in preventing, resolving and transforming conflict.

Tessa Mackenzie, in her 'Building Religious Tolerance in Fiji', sees that religious prejudices in Fiji are caused by a lack of knowledge and understanding of others' beliefs, and sometimes this is exacerbated by deliberate misinformation. For a proper understanding of what and how religions should see themselves and their ministry in Fiji, Tessa Mackenzie reminds us that the Bible as an entirety must be allowed to instruct us in the right things to do. After surveying representative texts from the Old and New Testaments, she concludes that God has control over *all* nations, and includes *all* people in his care and concern. Active *talanoa* and dialogue amongst religions, she urges, would do much to promote religious tolerance in the peoples of the land.



# Freedom of Options (Choices) on Traditional Systems

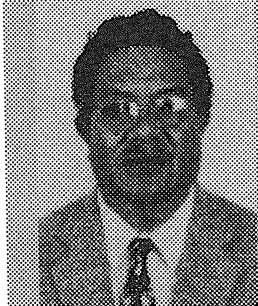
*(Speech delivered at the Methodist Consultative Council  
in the Pacific [MCCP]  
hosted by the Methodist Church of Samoa)*

## Greetings

It is indeed a great honour and pleasure for me to bring the most warm Christian greetings from the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, the President, Rev. Dr. 'Alifaleti Malakai Mone, and our General Conference, to the host of our MCCP here in Samoa, the Rev. Siatua Leuluaialii, President of the Methodist Church of Samoa, and to the People of Samoa, and members of the Methodist Consultative Council in the Pacific. We wish all of you and your loved ones God's richest blessings, and to all members of the Council, we do pray God's guidance on all your deliberations. Deo optimo maximo.

## Introduction

At the outset let me state an analogy that I would like to use to illustrate the meaning and functions of tradition<sup>1</sup>, traditur<sup>2</sup>, παραδοσις<sup>3</sup>, taufatungamotu'a<sup>4</sup>—as I propose in this presentation. Think of a ship's anchor,



**Rev. Dr. Tevita Tonga  
Mohenoa Puloka, PhD**

*An ordained minister in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, spans the disciplines of philosophy, economics, ethics, law, broadcasting, theology, and the sacred arts. Currently the Principal of Sia'atoutai Theological College, but has lectured at Boston University School of Theology, the School of Theology at Claremont, and the Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California. A graduate of Hawaii Pacific University, and he holds graduate and post graduate degrees from the School of Theology at Claremont; Pontifical University of St. Thomas Aquinas, Rome; and Boston University.*



which is a heavy object, usually a shaped iron weight with flukes, lowered by cable or chain to the bottom of the sea to keep the ship from drifting. An anchor is not only a very important part of the ship, but it is an equally indispensable part of every ship, big and small. In fact a ship without proper anchor is no ship, since a ship's movement, to a very large extent, depends on proper and effective functioning of its anchor. An anchor has two primary functions: firstly, to keep the ship in stable position and thus avoid drifting, and secondly, to allow the ship to move from a previously held position towards a new open position.

### Tradition, as a ships' anchor

When the ship is at port the crew put down the anchor to hold the ship at a stable, motionless position. When it is ready to set sail, the Captain orders the anchor to be pulled up and the ship starts to move, leaving a previously held position and sails towards a new open destination. As the ship's anchor is set down to keep the ship from drifting, and is pulled up to allow the ship to set sail, so is tradition. It is set down to hold the ship that is the Church in a stable position, whether for loading or unloading or repair, and until such time when the Captain orders the anchor to be pulled up for the ship to move again. The Church of Jesus Christ as a ship is a traditional analogy depicting the idea of "oikoumene," the household of God being transported from the world to the Kingdom of God. As long as the Oikoumene<sup>5</sup> is still in the world, it needs a good strong anchor to position the Church according to the will of God. The anchor that I am speaking about here is the full apparatus of the church in the world in regards to its structure, polity, worship, theology and teachings, and its relationships to politics, economics, and society. Each section of the apparatus is a part of the whole and it is the whole that constitutes the tradition, traditur, παραδοσις, and taufatungamotu'a, of the church.

I have been speaking of tradition to refer to various aspects of the church. I now propose to present and examine some particular





traditions in the light of today's challenges as to their effectiveness, relevancy, and overall utilitarian achievements. Therefore the followings are brief descriptions of the essential and basic structure, polity, theological and mission statements of the free Wesleyan Church of Tonga

A church structure is the external embodiment of an internal form which gives structure its functions and meanings. Thus, a particular church structure is an external mapping of an internal landscape which is exhibited in the various contours of the physical structure of the church.

In the case of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, its basic structure, polity, theology, and mission are integrated into a democratic connectional system which seeks to coordinate its various divisions into a representative and cohesive whole. Each component is a tradition and therefore a part of the larger tradition of the church.

### *Basic Structure*

The socio-physical structure of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is basically a connectional system in which the local church is the primary and most important unit<sup>6</sup>. From local churches, delegations are elected to such administrative bodies such as the District Quarterly Meetings, District Synods, and the Annual General Conference. The chief executive authority is vested in the representative Annual General Conference, which is led by an annually elected President and a General Secretary. It has the power to approve and accept election and ordination of ministers to various ministries of the Church. It is the legal representative of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga and makes all final decisions.

Acting directly under the auspices of the Annual General Conference, the Conference Standing Committee supervises the works of all Annual General Conference Departments, Committees, and Caucuses. Departments are the administrative bodies that carry out all ministries approved and commissioned by the Annual General

Conference. Each department is supervised via monthly department meetings by a Supervising Committee that reports directly to the Conference Standing Committee which meets once a month. Amongst these departments are Administration and Finance, Christian Education, Evangelism, Women's Division, Education (primary through high school and technical colleges), Sia'atoutai Theological College, Communication (newspaper, radio, television broadcasting), Overseas Mission Board, Church Music, Friendly Islands Bookshop, Taulua Printing Press, and Lands and Property Management. The Free Wesleyan Church Educational System is the oldest and largest educational system in the Kingdom. It provides general primary, secondary, and post secondary technical education.

### *Polity*

The main polity of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is in accordance with the Rules and Regulations as contained in the Constitution<sup>7</sup> of the Church. Prefaced by an introduction, the Constitution begins with the Church's Theological Statement of Beliefs and Basic Christian Doctrines. The basic form of church government is 'elected representative democracy'. The three main ruling bodies are Local Church Trust and Charge Conference, the District Quarterly Meetings and the Annual General Conference. The latter confirms and appoints ministers to their pastorates and other appointments beyond local churches. The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga Ordained Ministry is strictly a 4-year itinerancy<sup>8</sup>. Its appointing system is the responsibility of the President of the Conference, who then submits all ordained ministry appointments to His Majesty and the Annual General Conference for final approval and commissioning. The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is the largest (31% of national population) and oldest (founded in 1826) Christian denomination in the Kingdom. It enters into cooperative ministries with other Christian churches: a founding member of the National Council of Churches in Tonga; the Pacific Conference of Churches; and the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji. It is also an active member of the World Council of Churches and the World Methodist Conference.



## *Theological Statement*

The Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is a called community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. It is the redeemed and the redeeming fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by persons divinely called, and the Two Sacraments of the Lord's Supper and Baptism are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga seeks to provide for the maintenance of worship, edification of believers, and the redemption of the world. The Church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world.

With Christians of other communions we confess belief in the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three personae, of one substance, power, and eternity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost<sup>9</sup>.

In communion with all Christians we hold the following beliefs:

- We hold in common with all Christians a faith in the mystery of salvation in and through Jesus Christ.

- We share the Christian belief that God's redemptive love is realized in human life by the activity of the Holy Spirit, both in personal experience and in the community of believers.

- We understand ourselves to be part of Christ's universal Church when by adoration, proclamation, and service we become conformed to Christ.

- With other Christians we recognize that the reign of God is both a present and future reality.

- We share with many Christian communions a recognition of the authority of Scripture in matters of faith, the confession that our justification as sinners is by grace through faith,<sup>10</sup> and the sober realization that the Church is in need of continual reformation and renewal.

■ With other Christians, we declare the essential oneness of the Church in Jesus Christ.

### *Mission Statement*

Mission is God's pre-emptive movement towards the salvation of the world. It is a movement of prevenient grace coming to us even before we ask for; of God's grace residing in our midst in the person of Jesus Christ in whom we have been justified; and of God's sanctifying grace and thus restoring and prompting us to love God and the neighbour. Having received God's mission so fortuitously, the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga is compelled by faith to respond with proclamation, ministry, pastoralia, and ecumenics in the *missio Dei mundus*.

**1. Proclamation.** We proclaim God's gratuitous love as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments. The Gospel which is God's working out of our salvation through the redemptive and salvific acts of Christ is the ultimate reason for urgency of our proclamation.

**2. Ministry.** We are engaged by the Holy Spirit in the ministry of shepherding, caring, teaching, healing and comforting, guiding, and the edification of the flock. The ministry of Christ as contained in the Gospel is both the basis and reason for our involvement in ministry. With the Ministries of the Word, the Two Sacraments of the Lord's Supper, and Baptism, Teaching, and Pastoral<sup>11</sup>, we continue to follow the footsteps of the Servant who came not to be served but gave his life in the ministry of our redemption. Christ came to redeem the whole of God's creation. Seeing that natural and material resources are a part of God's design of care and sustenance of all human kind, we are therefore compelled to follow an ethically sound stewardship of material and monetary resources for use in the present and for the future. We acknowledge our rightful responsibility for care and maintenance of a sustainable ecological system.<sup>12</sup>



**3. Pastoralia:** With John Wesley's belief in spreading the Good News to the whole world, we witness to the mighty works of God in sending forth our own people to preach the good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

**4. Ecumenics:** Unity and One in Christ is not an option but a gift from God to all Christian believers. The writer of the Fourth Gospel recorded the following prayer of Jesus, "I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one.as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." We recognize the unique richness of God's creation and of whose essence is diversity in unity, therefore we celebrate our particular Wesleyan and Methodist heritage within the universal ecumenical fellowships of Christian Churches. In this regard, we recognize our responsibility to further Christianity unity. May the Holy Spirit continue to guide us as we journey in our faith with all Christian sisters and brothers toward the ultimate unity, that is, the beatific vision, beatitudo visio Dei, of One God One World Without End.

**5. Social Principles:** We do not yet have a confirmed statement on social principles though we have a Conference Committee, Taulama, that is still working on recommendations to General Conference.

An example of our concerns about some of new socio-political and scientific forces that are coming to the country recently is genetic engineering.<sup>13</sup>

From experience, the mere existence of an object is prescriptive of its prior status, essence, which gives the object its proof of existence, that is, a beginning and an end. It is therefore suffice to presume that not only an object does essentially have a beginning and an end, but so is existence, ontologically. Such is the principal characteristic nature of human existence and its subtypes since they are all creatures of divine origin of which the aseity of God is proof of the existence of both

the creator and creatures. In that respect, can it be said that a cloned persona does in fact resembles a human being, in spite of its dubious beginning and ending? For the pursuit of an unknown end or one with restrictive certainty is ethically unjustifiable. What is the ultimate purpose of human cloning?<sup>14</sup> If it is to provide a general sense of satisfaction, and therefore happiness for childless couples or for whatever reason, then the process is self-destructive because the means are ethically and theologically unsupportable while the end is insufficiently grounded, and therefore void. In reasserting Aristotelian teleology, Aquinas said that human actions are directed toward ends which, after attaining become means for attaining still other ends.

For a childless couple who desires a cloned baby, the attainment of such end as happiness according to Aquinas, is actually unattainable except ontologically. Such non-moral value as happiness is a state of being which contains successive ends rather than a destination. However, those succession of ends can only occur if there is a final end (2). The final end, according to Aquinas, is beatific vision of God, made possible by reason and revelation. Human cloning as an artificial manipulation of an otherwise naturally integrated biological reproductive system, fails the test even at the threshold of a secular world view. That view is that a cloned persona is only a personality and not a human being brought to the world as the intuitive end, which then becomes the chief good to which the father and mother had so lovingly laboured. From a Christian point of view however, a human baby is a gift from God and created in the *Imago Dei*. When a person is created in the image of God, that person is finally born into a well ordered universe of beings with all the myriad of integrated networks of biological, physiological, emotional, social, ecological, and spiritual relations. Accordingly, unity of form and substance does generate both the distinctive individuum and communis of the person. Such a human being is indeed the *loci communio* where God and human meet. Human cloning on the other hand, is only an isolated and disconnected physical remanufacturing of genetic materials.<sup>15</sup> Thus, genetic engineering as applied human cloning technology, completely fails the litmus test in both ethics and theology, simply because it tries to create one life by



destroying many more lives. Self-contradiction is the nullification of reason for being. Therefore the proposal is out of order and thereby cancels itself out. By the triple Aristotelian criteria of ascertaining the worthiness of the final end, human cloning technology again fails because it is contrary to those criteria: "first, being desirable to us for its own sake, second; being sufficient of itself to satisfy us, and third; being attainable by the wise among us."

### *Ethics Revisited*

When we speak of ethics in this Pacific Consultation on Bio-Ethics in Tonga, we mean Christian Ethics as opposed to any other kinds of ethics. For the sake of time and space, I will propose an examination of genetic engineering and human cloning technology using both teleological and deontological ethics as guidelines, and will conclude this first part with some injunctions from the Kantian "categorical imperative."<sup>16</sup>

As a working definition for our concern here, ethics is the sum total of our religious convictions that inform us of how we ought to behave. That particular and definite behaviour is a reflection of the norm or standard by which behaviour is judged and regulated. For Christians, the norm or standard of behaviour is Christian dogma as we have gleaned it from the teachings of the Holy Scriptures as interpreted by the Church. Therefore, by examining this whole business of genetic engineering and human cloning technology in the light of Christian ethics, two important tasks emerge as starting points. First is to determine whether or not genetic engineering and human cloning technology are good or bad according to Christian norm of the purpose of life. Second is the rightness or wrongness of such enterprise.

Let us start with genetic engineering. Before moving on, I should like to acknowledge with gratitude the innumerable worthwhile contributions science and technology have so courageously made towards development and sustenance of human life. In fact, life in this twenty first century, to a large extent, is made possible with a high degree of comfort and durability by science and technology. However,

as we are now accessible to reliable information about some recent activities of science and technology, especially in the areas of regional and international researches and funding, some very serious alarm have been sounded by reliable scientists, indigenous people's advocates, people's public monitors, churches, and others. It is no surprise that some multinational corporations which commission and fund these oversize researches are also the major arbitrators and benefactors, while indigenous peoples and their governments who are original owners of raw materials and information are left with pittance.<sup>17</sup>

This rather gloom comment isn't getting any improvement as far as the current status of researches and funding are concerned. So, what does ethics have to say especially to those poor and sick people who have been promised better and improved health, but can't afford either the financial costs or advocate? One of the important initial steps in this scenario is getting back to do a little soul searching regarding the true meaning and purpose of life. Here is a case for teleological ethics which asks if the meaning of life which gives life its true purpose does indeed justify sacrificing everything in exchange for such end? Of course we presume, as Christians, that the ultimate purpose of life is living justly in this world and living forever in the presence of the Living God. Opponent of this position will have a day in the park with the "pie-in-the-sky" ridicule, but as God's people we must dare to speak the truth.

The challenge for us here is living with dignity and justice in this world as God's people, and by the same token, we are Heaven dwellers with temporary earth addresses.<sup>18</sup> Should we sacrifice everything for such a short and temporary end (a watch in the night or the short lived blooming of the *mohokoi* blossoms in the predawn) such as this very fragile earthly dwelling? Teleological ethics says that if the *telos* is good, then the means of attaining such good end must also be equally good. After all the necessary considerations, a Christian-temporary-earth-dweller-but-Heaven-permanent-resident will declare that this earthly *telos* is fair enough for this temporary dwelling, but the ultimate *telos* which is the chief good is "the beatific vision of God", as in beatitudo





consistit in perfecta Dei visione et fruitione, the summum bonum.. As the Uesiliana hymn sings, "*ka sio pau, lata ai au, pea kau ka sioa 'a hono fofonga, te u toki lata ai au.....seeing your face my heart is content, and seeing it again, I am content for ever.*"

### *Some Elements of our Wesleyan Heritage Need Change*

It has been said that change is the only thing that does not change because it changes all the time. Nevertheless, in the church scheme of things it is important that change by both our vision of God's will for us today, and by our wise reading and interpretation of living in the world in this twenty first century. However, change is almost antagonistic to church and in some cases change is equivalent to evil. Church is quite notorious for its foot-dragging about change because it sometimes considers change as an attack on its teachings and or the devil's advocate. Change is fundamentally an altered state of being which is difference, newness, strangeness—all happen at once. Consider the following elements of our Wesleyan heritage that are presented here as needing change for the better.

**a) *Redefining of Ministerial Vocation.*** A Free Wesleyan of Tonga minister today is struggling with her/his vocation as the institution as well as the people place almost unlimited work expectations on the minister. As a result, a minister can become a perpetual tryout as she/he tries to do everything and does nothing well. Strictly speaking, vocation is the pastoral charge of the 'spiritual shepherd who provides pastoral care for the flock.' Nowadays however, the minister is the financier, builder, business manager, accountant, treasurer, entertainer, farmer, village keeper of traditions, overseas traveler and fundraiser, social planner, and then a preacher (may be 24 sermons a year),<sup>19</sup> pastoral counselor, and an attendant in church worship services and other occasions. A worst scenario is when a minister becomes a promoter of all social causes deemed necessary by the church, whilst the spiritual well is dry and the light is dimmed by exhaustion and confusion. Lack of clarity and confusion of pastoral identity kill the vision and diminish the glitter of hope in a minister's vocatio. Thus the

church must redefine ministerial vocatio in order to let the church minister as the 'pastoral comforter as well as the prophetic disturber,' that once called on the world and transformed it.

**b) Contextualization:**<sup>20</sup> This particular way of doing and understanding things is applicable to church theology, liturgy, pastoralia, studies, worship, and practically to all church activities. Contextualization as a theological methodology, is a natural growth that takes both the gospel and the context into the process of announcing the reign of God and the response of the people. It is thus a responsive dialogue between God and God's people. But why contextualization now? The answer lies in the increasing growth of deadening presence in the life of the church today. Mismatching, discontinuity, misappropriation, and just plain ignorance are but some of the precursors of low productivity and negative achievements in today's ministry. Contextualization, is thus in order, as "the inevitable interpenetration between the text which is the word of God on one hand, and the context which is our human condition on the other hand."

**c) Theology and Practice:** There is serious mismatching between our theology and our practice, due to discontinuity between them. At our ministerial meeting at this year's March Quarterly Meeting, a recommendation from a particular district asked the Conference to lower the age of holy communicant from 15 to 6. The reason was that the presiding minister would feel sorry for not serving those young children who would follow their mothers to the altar at the time of Holy Communion. A biblical text cited was Jesus' familiar analogy of a young child to the Kingdom of God. But a clear delineation of the parabolic Kingdom of God, which is the larger picture and the allegorical young child who is the transparency of the larger picture, is a more helpful exegesis of the text. In that case the giving of communion to six year olds is not based on the doctrinal requirement of mental comprehension. But it is rather an allegorical act to make the Kingdom parable more transparent and meaningful to young children. Our praxis must always be informed by our theological teachings and beliefs. Bad exegesis of biblical texts contributes to mismatching of theoria and



praxis. A good grasp of the theology of the sacraments would clearly inform the praxis of holy communion.<sup>21</sup>

A dangerous trend that has influenced and blazed a trail of anti-intellectual climate amongst clergy in general. Fear, lack of confidence of one's faith, and the necessary pastoral competency for successful and meaningful ministry are the culprits.

**d) Liturgy and Worship.** Liturgy as the corporate work of the people of God as they seek to make meaningful of the divine murmuring and prompting in their lives, is fundamentally a native response to God's urging. Currently our liturgy is predominantly of Western substance left over by the 18<sup>th</sup> Century European missionaries. Almost all our hymns, anthems, other religious music, and written prayers were transported from Europe in their European carps. The leitmotif of liturgy is its enhancement of worship that happens and is achieved by the kindling of all the senses in response to God's prompting as in *gratia praeveniens*, the grace that comes before all human response to God.

Our young people sometimes prefer those 'palangi songs' and seem to believe that they are of higher quality and importance than our native songs. It is not an easy task to convince them of the true meaning and appropriation of our native music in worship. A more quiet and sedated liturgy is not in tune with the more celebrative climate of a Tongan village church. Why should a Mozart composition deemed highly heavenly when it was written in German language for German people more than 200 years ago, whilst a Tongan poet's more compelling and relevant composition is rejected as too native and therefore too worldly?

**e) Church Culture versus Indigenous Culture.** Culture, as ways and means of a people, is substantially an inter-action between people and their surroundings. The familiar social dictum that environment shapes and influences one's character is rather strangely applied to the relationship between church culture and native culture.<sup>22</sup> At times, the comfort, peace, joy, and love enjoyed in the native culture are absent

from church worship, meetings, school, and other church activities which are more controlled and stiffly strident. Church deals very poorly in matters of discipline such as trial, conviction, punishment, blaming the victim, and slow and hard to forgive. A wronged neighbour often substantially forgives the wrong doer sooner than the church's tribunal that waits for evidence after evidence, and sometimes seems forever.

**f) *Homosexuality and the Pacific Church.*** I do not presume to speak for or on behalf of the many Christian Churches of the Pacific Islands. Nonetheless, as a brother minister who has been deeply hurt by some recent polity, theological, ethical, and missional decisions by our sister/brother churches - Uniting Church in Australia, Methodist Church in New Zealand, and now the United Methodist Church in USA - I simply wish to say to you, "I come with the welcoming mat and it is better that we speak now, or else we shall both be perished by our own follies." The liturgical theme of this last Lent has been helpful to me as I struggle with my faith journey, *Christus afflictus est redemptionem* vicarious. It is therefore my hope that with the vicarious suffering of Christ, we may all experience our suffering as means of our healing.

More than 100 years ago, your ancestors came to my land as bearers of the Gospel and got my ancestors to change their lotu to the 'palangi lotu.' For good or bad, my people were changed, and changed forever. We were given new lotu, new names, and new ways of doing and living. You told us to pray together to your 'Otua, and we did and still do, but when we opened our eyes you had decided all by yourself to change the name of our fale, from Methodist to UC, and to change the basis of Christian teachings on human relationships.

But let me ask you now, did you forget about me? But how could you, after all these many years? You see, you can change so easily, but for me it is not that easy. For the church to me is my life, everything that I do revolves around the church. That is what you taught me, but I now see that you have changed so much that I almost cannot tell whether you are in a church or in a restaurant. Your decision regarding homosexuality and ordained ministry has hurt me so much that I asked



my Sisu Tonga to keep me on the right path that I do not dislike you. You see I still like you, and I even love. O how can I sever our relationship when our Pacific Christ has come to us to save our broken relations? Nevertheless, I keep my gaze at the suffering face of Christ, knowing the pain of God is the best medicine, most potent, to'omotafi, fakafeta'i 'Eiki!

Time is too short, and there is not enough time to continue hating, unforgiving, and unloving. For the only time left is time to forgive and to love. Before I leave you now, let me remind you one of your ancestor's most treasured wishes:

*Except I be by Sylvia in the night,  
There is no music in the nightingale,  
Unless I look on Sylvia during the day,  
There is no day for me to look upon.<sup>23</sup>*

I am Sylvia, of the Pacific Islands, who are you?

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Tradition, as that which is being handed down from previous holder.

<sup>2</sup> Traditur, the body of knowledge which holds wise teachings of the past.

<sup>3</sup> παραδοσις, past wisdom being handed down as guide

<sup>4</sup> Taufatungamotu'a, original basis of modern knowledge; a principal rafter of the fale Tonga.

<sup>5</sup> Oikoumene, the whole inhabited earth, ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΗΣ, symbolizes the church as ship.

<sup>6</sup> Each local church has its administrative body called Fakaha Kakai (people participation) that meets once a quarter to decide on matters that must go to Quarterly Meeting or to Annual General Conference. In fact General Conference deals only with matters passed on from Fakaha Kakai to Quarterly Meeting to Synods called, Faka Vahe Fonua, which then decides on matters to go to General Conference.

<sup>7</sup> FWCT Constitution is the oldest written constitution amongst Pacific Islands churches. It clearly states that it does not approve of homosexual behaviour because it is sin according to the Holy Scriptures.

<sup>8</sup> FWCT ordains both women and men into ordained ministry.

<sup>9</sup> FWCT subscribes fully to Chalcedonian Creed regarding humanity and divinity of Christ, ὁμοούσιος, and same substance with the father as regards his Godhead, ὁμοουσιος.

<sup>10</sup> FWCT takes seriously Wesley's distinctive emphasis on "justification by grace through grace alone," iustificatio sola gratia sola fide.

<sup>11</sup> Besides our general pastoral care by pastors, our Department of Christian Education conducts specialized training and pastoral counseling through our Youths' and Young Adults' Crisis Ministries, Langikapo Mei Hevani. Specialized ministries conduct training, counseling, and treatment in the areas of tobacco, alcohol, illicit drugs, destructive sexual behaviour, and suicide.

<sup>12</sup> Work has begun on development of theological perspectives regarding Creation and human habitat, see my, Eco-theology: Sanctity and Utility of Natural Environment, an unpublished document in the possession of the author. Ocean level rising is primary cause for current evacuation of parts of Kanokupolu village in western Tongatapu.

<sup>13</sup> *Kingdom of Clones is Telos Without a Cause: An Ethical and Theological Perspective.* Title of my paper at Pacific Consultation on Bioethics, held at Tonga National Council of Churches, Nuku'alofa, 12-14 March 2001.

<sup>14</sup> At best, human cloning is scientific exploration even though it is still illegal in most countries. It is however a dirty gambling using human genes to prove a nonexistent phenomenon.

<sup>15</sup> Human cloning technology is only an excuse for industrial and mega business profits. By all accounts it is unchristian and therefore unacceptable. Even Cato, 234-149 BC, would oppose human cloning, Emas, non quod opus est, sed quod necesse est: quod non opus est, asse carum est. Buy not what you can use, but you cannot do without. What you do not need is dear at any price.

<sup>16</sup> "Always act in such a way that you can also will that the maxim of your own action should become an international law."

<sup>17</sup> Some of the Pacific Islands have copyright laws but not all sufficiently tested to withstand the overwhelming forces of multinational corporations. Here is a strong case for UN international Intellectual Property Rights Protocol to monitor multinational corporations' sponsorship and funding of genetic engineering activities in developing countries.

<sup>18</sup> A Christian's residential address is Christ's injunction in Johannine language, 8:32, "Know the truth and the truth will set you free," και η αληθεια ελευθερωσει υμους.

<sup>19</sup> Lack of preaching experience amongst clergy is a serious diminishing return to the FWCT. Though most preaching is done by the laity even though individual lay speaker has less experience and training than her/his pastor. There are more than 7,000 lay speakers in the FWCT, and most of them receive rather ineffective training.

<sup>20</sup> Puloka, Tevita Tongamohenoa, *Toward Contextualization: An Attempt at Contextualizing Theology for the Tongan Church.* School of Theology at Claremont,

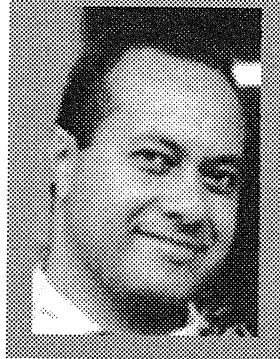


California, USA. D.Min., 1979. Published by University Microfilms International, 300 Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI. 48106

<sup>21</sup> A dangerous trend that has influenced and blazed a trail of anti-intellectual climate amongst clergy in general. Fear, lack of confidence of one's faith, and the necessary pastoral competency for successful and meaningful ministry are the culprits.

<sup>22</sup> The biblical ethics of 'unconditional love' does necessarily produce 'unconditional forgiveness,' however, church has strangely interpreted and pursued 'unconditional' as 'conditional' since nothing happens without previous condition. This flawed argument is negated by the fact that the previous condition of wrong doing committed, is the very reason for forgiveness according to basic Christian teachings of the Scriptures.

<sup>23</sup> Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Act 3, Scene 1. The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Spring Books, London, 1958



**Rev. Dr Ma'afu'otuʻitonga Palu**

*BSc. BEd. (UNSW, Sydney) BD (STC, Tonga), MA (Moore Theological College, NSW), DMin (Faith Evangelical Lutheran Seminary, Tacoma, Washington, USA)*

*Lecturer in Biblical Studies, teaching OT, Hebrew and Greek at the Siaʻatoutai Theological College (STC) since 2001.*

## Contextualisation as Bridging the Hermeneutical Gap *Some Biblical Paradigms*

### Introduction

In two previous contributions to this journal I have discussed theological contextualisation, first by probing into the necessity of contextualisation for us Pasifikans and then by offering some critical reflections on the current 'pot-plant transportation' model of contextualisation (Palu, 2002, 2003b). These articles demonstrate a disappointment with this model in Pacific Theology that is primarily to do with its tendency to sidetrack not only professional theologians, but similarly the devotion of the laity, from the traditional moorings of Christian theology. I am convinced that as a model of contextualisation, it results in a widening of the 'gap' between theologians and laity, as it has the unfortunate effect of making the historical Biblical message ultimately impractical at the grassroots level of the local churches.

In actual fact, the impracticality of the current 'pot-plant transportation' model stems from Pacific Theology's chosen point of departure. It has chosen several reference points *outside* the Biblical text to be normative. Pacific theologians have been summoned to derive descriptive categories for theological reflections from their respective





cultures, legends, myths and even their physical surroundings. The inevitable result has been the invention of theological categories, such as 'coconut theology' and 'Christ the perfect pig', which although they are relatively familiar to Pasifikans, are profoundly remote from and even contradictory to the Biblical framework.

This essay briefly describes what should be the proper starting point for any theological contextualisation, namely the existence of a 'hermeneutical gap' between the people and events of the Bible and people in today's world. Then three paradigms are offered, in which this 'hermeneutical gap' has been bridged, as exemplified by the Biblical writers themselves, with specific reference to the writers of the New Testament. First I clarify the general terminology used in this discussion.

## Hermeneutics

There has, during the past two decades, been a growing obsession with the issue of hermeneutics in Biblical scholarship. The term 'hermeneutics' is occasionally used as a euphemism for 'the skill of all but totally ignoring the Bible while appearing to accept it' (Silva, 1983:156). Traditionally, the actual study of the text to determine its meaning was known as *exegesis* and the principles by which one attempted to perform it were called *hermeneutics*. In modern hermeneutical debate, however, it appears that 'the word "hermeneutics" is skidding around on an increasingly broad semantic field' (Carson, 1980:14).

Nevertheless, some helpful working definitions of hermeneutics include the following: the study of the locus of meaning and the principles of interpretation (Tate, 1991:15); the science of reflecting on how a word or an event in a past culture may be understood and become existentially meaningful in the present (Braaten, 1966:131); the task of determining the meaning of a statement for the author and for the first hearers or readers, and thereupon to transmit that meaning to modern readers (Mickelsen, 1963:5); or defining the rules one uses when



seeking out the meaning of Scripture (McKim, 1986:13). These fairly typical definitions all tend to complicate the simplicity of the meaning of the term *hermeneutics*, so I suggest a less complicated one.

As serious Bible believers (i.e. those who espouse a high view of the authority of the Bible to give guidance in matters of faith and practice),<sup>1</sup> what we do unconsciously every time we read our Bibles is hermeneutics. It is an uncommon word for an everyday activity, 'the process of reading something and working out its meaning and significance for us' (Ng, 1998:6). It is indeed an everyday (i.e. ordinary) process, because we engage in it every time we read a newspaper, look at a display on a notice board or even listen to a sermon in chapel.

When we come to reading the Bible, hermeneutics usually refers to the 'way we read and "apply" the Biblical message to our modern situation' (Ng, 1998:6). It is how we take an ancient text and hear what it is saying to *us* here and now. In other words, with respect to reading the Bible, hermeneutics seeks to respond to the question, 'What is the meaning for today of the passage in front of me?' We shall be able to shed more light on this definition through a comparison of hermeneutics, exegesis and homiletics (see Goldsworthy, 1981:43).

## Hermeneutics, Exegesis and Homiletics

To apply the ancient text of the Scriptures to us in our respective contemporary situations inevitably involves three consecutive stages. First, there is 'exegesis', which simply means explaining the text. It is the term used to refer to the process of finding out what the text *originally meant* to its first readers. The question guiding this stage of the interpretive process is, 'What did the passage mean to the intended readers?' It is necessary to try to determine what the author intended to convey to his (and I am assuming male authorship for all the books of the Bible) readers there and then, before we can ever show its relevance to us here and now.



Secondly, there is 'hermeneutics', which as I have asserted, refers to the effort to *interpret the text to us here and now*. The question regulating this stage of reading is, 'What does the passage mean for us today?' Hermeneutics is the process of showing how the ancient Biblical text has general relevance for us in our world today.

Thirdly, there is 'homiletics'. Once hermeneutics is in place, then the general application of the text can be turned into specific applications to the life of the readers or hearers. One such method of application is homiletics (preaching). The homiletic process is the preacher bringing the text from its original meaning (exegesis) through its general Christian interpretation (hermeneutics) to its specific application to the contemporary congregation. The question guiding this process of application is, 'What does the passage say about specific issues in our lives today?'

### The Hermeneutical 'gap'

The description of the three stages in which the Biblical text is made contemporary to us has assumed the existence of a 'hermeneutical gap' between the world of the Scriptures and our world today. This *hermeneutical gap* refers to 'all the things that separate us from the Bible and which make reading and applying the Bible a tricky business' (Ng, 1998:6). The bridging of this 'gap' demands that we should have the right set of 'hermeneutical principles'. With the wrong hermeneutical principles we may end up inadequately or wrongly applying the Word of God and therefore missing what God intends us to hear and do.

It is reasonable to presuppose the existence of the hermeneutical gap as a matter of common sense (see Goldsworthy, 1981:22-9). In fact, we are separated from the Bible in our spatial-time existence in three different ways.

First, we are separated from the events and the original readers of the Bible by a *time* gap. The last book of the Bible was written within the first century AD.<sup>2</sup> From then until now, we are separated from the Bible by twenty centuries.

Secondly, we are separated from the original readers of the Bible by a *culture* gap, spanning across the time and the space gaps. Included in this culture gap is a whole baggage of language, custom, dress, education, religious background and more. This aspect of the Biblical text is specifically felt by non-Jews, such as Pasifikans, since we are culturally removed from the Jews, the race to which Jesus in his humanity belonged. Not only so, but we are also geographically removed from Palestine, the land in which he lived. Thus, the further we go back in Biblical history, the greater the gap that separates us from the Bible, not only time-wise but also culturally (Goldsworthy, 1981: 23–4).

Thirdly, there is also a *theological* gap separating us from the original readers of the Bible. The Word of God was specifically addressed to past historical epochs or dispensations in God's plan of salvation but not to our dispensation. In other words, the Bible might be God's word for Israel in the time of, say for instance, Isaiah or Jeremiah but, from a historical–theological perspective, it was not directly given to us in the twenty-first century.

These three 'gaps'—of time, culture and theology—together constitute the 'hermeneutical gap' confronting us when we read our Bibles today. They are seen as hindrances to a right application of the ancient Biblical text to our world of the twenty-first century.

## The Hermeneutical Gap and Contextualisation

The assumption of a 'hermeneutical gap' provides the common ground between hermeneutics and contextualisation. Missiologists in the 1970s developed contextualisation as the process of cross-cultural



communication, of determining the significance of a Biblical text for a group distanced from the events contained in the Bible. The distance between the Biblical text and the group distanced from it is a barrier—formed by the historical, cultural and theological gaps between the Biblical world and our own (Osborne, 1993:396)—that needs to be overcome in order for us properly to appreciate the Biblical content in the contemporary situation. Contextualisation as a process seeks to break down this ‘barrier’ in order to communicate the message of the Bible effectively to people today.

Carson argues that ‘contextualisation’ happens in what he calls the ‘third horizon’, that is, when we who have understood the Biblical text began to ‘teach and evangelize the content of Scripture to another group’ (Carson, 1987:218). His argument seems to make perfect sense if the ‘missionary’ is a foreigner to the ‘receptor’ culture. But as Pasifikans, our problem is primarily to do with seeking to understand what the text of the Scriptures means to us here in the Pacific in the present time. In that sense, ‘contextualisation’ happens, in accordance with Carson’s interpretive schema, in the ‘second horizon’ where, seeking to make the Bible relevant to us today, we attempt to fuse the ‘horizon of the text’ and our horizon of understanding as Pasifikans.

Strictly speaking, contextualisation is the human aspect of this attempt. There is of course a spiritual aspect, which has been consistently downplayed in most discussions of contextualisation, namely the activity of the Holy Spirit in applying the text of Scriptures to our hearts (cf. Rom.5:5). For this reason, we can expect that even without an awareness of the ‘horizons of understanding’ and the ‘hermeneutical gap’, there is a real possibility that someone may become a believer simply by reading the Bible.

Cast in that light, contextualisation is a hermeneutical method, a way of seeking to cross the ‘barrier’ between the Biblical text and our present context in order to apply its inspired truths to us in ways that are appropriate and relevant to our historical, cultural and theological existence in the twenty-first century. Understanding contextualisation in

those terms implies that the proper question to set the agenda for the theological contextualisation enterprise is, 'What is the meaning of the Bible for us today?' Here in the Pacific, the question becomes, 'What is the meaning of the Bible for us *as Pasifikans* today?'

## How the hermeneutical gap affects the way we read the Bible

The recognition of the 'hermeneutical gap' that separates us today from the Bible has led to a number of proposals as to how we may bridge it. Many have sought to listen to the 'still small voice' of God for guidance in serious matters of faith in the contemporary situation (see the insightful discussion in Jensen, 2002:162-4, 257-79). This kind of prompting has been depicted in popular Christian literature as the way of the godly believer, in stark contrast to the way of the theologian. Thus, Joyce Huggett speaks of a husband and wife rising up every morning to 'read the Bible, pray and listen for God's still small voice. Whenever they sensed God was speaking to them, they would write down the instruction or challenges or directions they received. They determined to obey to the best of their ability' (cited in Jensen, 2002:257). In support of this perception, David Watson, a pastor rather than a theologian, is quoted as saying, 'Since God is the living God, he is constantly trying to speak to us and we in turn need to listen to him..... If we are to keep spiritually alive and alert, we need every word that God is continually speaking' (Huggett, 1986:21, 93, cited in Jensen 2002:257).

The longing for a contemporary word from God is a trend increasingly accepted and implemented in groups who consider themselves to be serious believers, both in the broader church context and even in our current situation here in the Pacific. In most Bible study group discussions, the participants would begin by saying, 'The Lord has spoken to me . . .'<sup>3</sup> As a contemporary vogue, it reflects several needs of Christian people. First, there is the need for assurance about the will of God. Listening to the Lord is a way of giving assurance to



the believer that he or she remains in intimate relationship with the Lord. Secondly, there is also people's need for guidance in the difficult dilemmas of life. The Scriptures of course counsel us for salvation in Christ. The desire for immediate private revelation reflects a hunger for God to tell us which career to follow or which bus to catch—the ordinary decisions of everyday life. But Scriptural revelation also contains words of commandment, wisdom and promise that enable us to make these and the thousands of other ordinary decisions of everyday life.

This hunger for a private revelation from God is, in my judgment, another way in which today's world has shown its acceptance of the negative verdict on the Bible of movements such as the Enlightenment. It was the Enlightenment that claimed to set humanity free from its self-incurred immaturity by exhorting them with the cliché, 'have courage to use your own understanding' (Kant, 1991:54). It can be asserted, however, that this statement has received a radical revision at the hands of the contemporary hunger for fresh revelation, to become 'have courage to use your own revelation'. In effect, this becomes another form of theological liberalism, because it implies that the Scriptures are incomprehensible to people today and must be substituted with contemporary revelations or other forms of revelation (see Pierard, 1984:631–5). Peter Jensen is correct in saying that [t]he idea that God may be continually speaking in the still small voice may sound 'godly' and relational, but it is a myth. The very passage that . . . refers to the 'still small voice' (1 Kgs.19:12 AV; NIV, 'a gentle whisper') in fact offers us only the counsel that Elijah received: no new mode of revelation, but life under the covenantal commands of God. (Jensen, 2002:278)

Whilst the contemporary hunger for fresh revelation from God implicitly denies the relevance of the Bible as God's Word for our contemporary situation, critical scholarship is more explicit in its announcement of the same verdict. David Tracy, for instance, speaks of the Biblical text as the 'dustbin of history' whose meaning we can never adequately retrieve because of the diverse possibilities and limitations of human understanding.<sup>4</sup> But even if it can be extracted, it would have no bearing on our present context since we are living in an

utterly different historical and cultural age from that of the Biblical authors.<sup>5</sup> The Biblical texts, so Tracy's argument goes, are nothing more than an ancient artefact that has no binding implications for the way we live today.

For Tracy, the best the ancient text can do is to 'provoke' us towards responsible performance in the here and now. Such a provocation, however, does not depend on the referential status of the text, because our epistemic limitations mean that we can never correctly comprehend what the text says. In effect, since the time gap separates us from the original readers, God's Word for them is bound to be utterly different from his Word for us today. In actual fact, Tracy's argument implies that God's Word for us here and now may even contradict his Word for them there and then, since our contemporary postmodern situation controls the way in which we can be provoked by the ancient text. To give the Scriptures the authority to inform and transform the way we live in the present is, according to Tracy, to hand ourselves over to the 'dustbin of history'.

Another way in which the hermeneutical gap is allowed to influence the way we read the Bible is set forth by Tom Wright, who argues that the Bible is very much like a four-act Shakespearean play whose fifth act has been lost. According to this analogy, the Bible consists of acts one to four. The content of the missing 'fifth act' depends on how experienced actors who, having fully immersed themselves in the four extant acts, would then work out what the fifth act might reasonably contain, had Shakespeare himself written it (Wright, 1992:140-3).

Wright's proposal is not substantially different from Tracy's. The common ground between their views is the conviction that the Biblical content belongs to bygone ages, which can function only to provoke us (Tracy) or direct us (Wright) towards responsible living in the present time. Even though Wright, contrary to Tracy, would acknowledge the authority of the first four acts in the way the 'experienced actors' would perform the fifth, there is a sense in which these actors can exercise their own freedom in the way they determine the outcome of the first





four acts. In effect, what Wright is advancing is tantamount to saying that in the contemporary situation, it is our responsibility to fill in the details of our faith and practice, out of patiently watching and waiting on God. That is to say, since we are separated by the time gap from the original readers, we ought to be open to the possibility that the application of God's Word for us could be different from his Word to them.

Wright's proposal has been implemented by C.H. Pinnock, who baptises 'scholarly' and 'contemporary empirical' consensus as the illumination of the Spirit for our contemporary context. He repeatedly criticises those who continue to hold on to the traditional value of the Scriptures for being terrified by the new developments manifested by the contemporary scholarly class (Pinnock, 1998, 1999). Ironically speaking, one gets the impression that Pinnock is operating under the domination of the formula, 'if you cannot beat the odds, join them'. Although he accuses of being terrified those scholars whose conclusions about the status of the Bible are more in line with the traditional beliefs of Christianity, it appears that it is he himself who is being terrorised by new developments, such as those advanced by Wright. Since he has no counter argument, he is bound to 'go with the flow'. But even a 'dead dog' can go with the flow! In place of the inner promptings of the Holy Spirit, Pinnock proposes the 'contemporary scholarly consensuses' as the 'Word of God' for us in matters of faith and practice.

Yet another proposal to the way in which the hermeneutical gap can be bridged is represented by Gordon D. Fee. Taking the cultural gap seriously, Fee proposes a hermeneutical principle that should guide us in applying the Epistles to the contemporary situation. He suggests that 'whenever we share comparable particulars (i.e. similar specific life situations) with the first century setting, God's Word to us is the same as his Word to them' (Fee & Stuart, 1993:60).

But Fee is emphatic that these must be 'genuinely comparable situations'. In effect, what is being said is that if we do not share the same cultural situation with the original readers of the Epistles, then

God's Word for us is bound to be utterly different from his Word to them. In such instances, the Word of God to those in the first century must be left as it is, for it is no longer applicable to us here and now. In fact, to attempt to apply the command across the cultural gap is, according to Fee, to mis-hear and distort God's Word and thus be guilty of grave error.

Fee's application of his hermeneutical principle to the issue of the role of women in church, however, is rather instructive in identifying the weaknesses of his own proposal. He argues that whereas education is the expected norm in our society, women in the first century had few educational opportunities. Here then is a case in which our cultural situation is extremely different from that of the first century. Thus, God's Word regarding the role of women in the first century, such as forbidding women to teach and to have authority over men (1 Tim.2:11-15) is culturally relative and need not be followed today. The same hermeneutical principle can of course be applied to the issue of the submission of wives to their husbands!

### A Biblical Point of Departure for Hermeneutical Considerations

What I have provided in the previous section is but a brief sketch of some influential attempts at bridging the hermeneutical gap.<sup>6</sup> It appears, however, that these scholarly proposals share a common point of departure. Most contemporary hermeneutical considerations seem to begin with the assumption that whatever God said in the past has no direct implications for us today. To resort, therefore, to the Bible for guidance in matters of faith and practice in the contemporary situation is to consult an artefact of the ancient past that has no normative binding authority for us today. This kind of mindset undergirds the hermeneutical insights of Wright, Pinnock, Tracy, Fee and even the contemporary openness to fresh revelations from God.



In an extreme case, an insistence is made that the Word of God to our contemporary situation may even contradict God's Word in the past—hence rendering God a liar! The best example in which this hermeneutical principle can be observed is in the acceptance of homosexual clergy amongst the ecclesiastical ranks in some quarters of Christianity. Even though the Scriptures speak consistently against such a practice (Lev.18:22; 20:13; 1 Kgs.14:24; Rom.1:26–27 cf. 1 Cor.6:9–11) as well as reminding us that 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away' (Mk.13:31), it is gradually becoming common for the church to defer taking a stand against homosexuality by opting to wait for a clear directive from the Holy Spirit concerning the matter at hand.<sup>7</sup> In this respect, the contemporary church is failing to distinguish between the Holy Spirit of God and the unholy spirit of humanity (cf. Kung, 1978:468–72). The expectation of the ecclesiastical establishment is that the Spirit will eventually endorse the possibility of immoral practices amongst their ranks, over against the clear directives God has given in the Scriptures through the inspiration of his Holy Spirit in the past.

In that sense, the problem with the proposals we have considered in the previous section for bridging the hermeneutical gap lie in the assumption they make about the Biblical text. These scholarly proposals depict a specific view of God and of the Bible.

With respect to God, the assumption is that he has a particular 'openness' in his nature, that he can accommodate himself to new discoveries through the progress of the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the time).<sup>8</sup> Although God was strictly against immoral practices such as homosexuality in the past—to the extent that he even destroyed an entire city because of it (Gen.19)—in the modern world he has obligingly accommodated himself to the 'spirit of the age'. Such a perception of God renders his Word profoundly unworthy of our trust, because he is 'open' to change his mind along with changes in the human context.

With respect to the view of the Bible implied in such attempts at bridging the hermeneutical gap, it appears that they implicitly share a common distrust of the Scriptures as the living Word of the living God, which is applicable to humanity in any historical context. The Bible is considered to be a book just like any other book, whose pertinence is bound to wither with time. Thus, whatever God says therein may have been applicable to the time of the original readers but not to us in the twenty-first century.

As a result, we have to choose as our hermeneutical point of reference a vantage point 'outside', even 'foreign' and remotely removed from the Biblical data itself, and from it we then attempt to derive a hermeneutical principle that seeks to make the Bible relevant to our contemporary situation. This is certainly a trend observable in theological contextualisation in the publications of Pacific theologians (Palu, 2002, 2003b).

If, however, we maintain that the Bible is the eternal Word of God, then there is also a need to reflect on the overarching structure of God's revelation in the Bible for assistance in seeking to derive hermeneutical principles that will remain faithful to the Scriptures and even pragmatically relevant to our contemporary context. In future publications in this journal I hope to indicate how the comprehensive structure of God's revelation in the Scriptures may assist us in making the Bible relevant to us today.<sup>9</sup> Here, I shall confine myself to considering the various ways in which the human authors of the Scriptures, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, attempted in their own writings to bridge the hermeneutical gap that existed between the Old and the New Testaments. The intention here is to display Biblical paradigms that may assist us, not only here in the Pacific, but even in the broader theological context, to bridge the hermeneutical gap from the Bible to our contemporary contexts and thus to hear the voice of God speaking afresh to us.<sup>10</sup>



## Bridging the Hermeneutical Gap: some Biblical Paradigms

When we turn to the Scriptures, we find that [t]he Bible itself is a massive demonstration of how Scripture becomes contemporary, covering as it does a period of more than a thousand years during which the people on whom the story centers experienced profound changes. (Smart, 1970:152)

In fact, in the Bible, we can observe that comparative cultural, historical and even theological settings are *not* the significant factors in the application of God's Word. There are examples where the cultures, the historical times and even the theological settings are vastly different, but the application of the Word of God is the same to each group.

### *Paradigm #1: Different culture, same application of God's words*

God's Word, for instance to a group of nomadic Jews wandering around the desert in the 13th century BC, is the same Word to a group of city dwelling Gentile Christians in Corinth in the 1st century AD. The two groups are separated by a time gap of about 1400 years. They are also separated by a cultural gap—different languages, customs, dress, education, religious backgrounds and more. But yet, God's Word and acts of judgment upon the exodus generation are applied directly and without qualification to the believers in Corinth: 'Now these things (the acts of judgment during the exodus) occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did . . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us' (1 Cor.10:6, 11).

With respect to the role of women in the first century, it is interesting to note that the ancient text of Genesis is applied directly to the situation in the first century (see 1 Tim.2:11–15 and Eph.5:25–33). The roles and patterns of relationship that God had ordained at the

beginning of time, in creation, were still rendered applicable to those from a different culture living in a different set of spatial-time dimensions. For Paul, God's order of creation was firmly established in the beginning, such that the passing of millennia and massive changes in culture did not alter the basic sense and applicability of the Biblical text.

Since the so-called historical and cultural gaps posed no hindrance to the direct relevance and application of God's Word from the Old Testament to the New, we must ask why it should pose any necessary problem from the New Testament to us today.

*Paradigm #2: Same culture,  
different applications of God's Word*

In the Bible we also find examples of the reverse scenario, in which genuine comparative cultural particulars exist, but yet the application of God's Word is different. For instance, the first century culture of Judaism is comparable to that of those about whom the book of Leviticus in the Old Testament was written. However, the writer of Hebrews tells the Jewish readers to have nothing to do with animal sacrifices and temples (Heb.10:1-14). The same thing can be said concerning the food laws (Lev.11). The Judaism of the first century is relatively comparable to that of the time of the book of Leviticus, in which certain foods were prohibited for the Jews, yet Jesus declared all foods clean (Mk.7:19). If the key to the application of God's Word to us today is a similar situation as Fee and Stuart (1993:60) argued, then one wonders why Jesus did not understand this.

*Paradigm #3: Different historical time,  
same applications of God's Word*

There are also numerous examples in the Bible of people living in different historical eras and yet the same Word of God is applied to them. When the Sadducees confronted Jesus with a question about the



resurrection, he replied by quoting to them what God had said to Moses on Mount Horeb: 'But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what *God said to you*, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?"' (Mat.22:31 cf. Ex.3:6).

In the Old Testament literary context, this statement was God's Word specifically addressed to Moses, who was separated by about 1300 years from the Sadducees. While Moses and the Sadducees belonged to the same race and believed in the same God, their worldviews or belief systems were by no means similar. The Sadduceean worldview is more in line with modern (or postmodern) naturalistic philosophy, since they did not believe in the resurrection of the dead (Mat.22:23). Yet Jesus appeared to overlook the *historical* time gap when he applied God's Word to Moses in the 13th century BC directly to the Sadducees in the 1st century AD.

In addition to that, Paul applied God's instruction to Jews (on the proper conduct of their oxen) in the 13th century BC directly to believers in the 1st century AD, living in a comparatively different culture. With no hint of embarrassment or even regret, what God said to the Jews in the wilderness on the propriety of their oxen while treading out the grain is applied directly to the right of gospel workers to be given their wages by the church (1 Tim.5:17–18 cf. Deut.25:4). The cultural and time gaps do not seem to be hindrances for the application of God's Word in the past to those living in the first century.

## Some Concluding Reflections

These paradigms serve as samples of how the hermeneutical gap even between the authors within the Bible was bridged.<sup>11</sup> Whilst the samples depicted in this essay are not exhaustive, they are cases in point for contextualisation as it is being conducted in the Pacific. The current 'pot-plant transportation' model involves seeking to transport the Gospel truth from the so-called Western cultural 'pot' to the Pacific cultural 'soil', resulting in theological truths adopting a distinctively Pacific cultural outfit. From the examples of the Biblical authors we have

sketched in this essay, it appears that even within the Bible itself, the cultural gap did not mean that God's Word given to one culture should acquire a different cultural guise in order to be applicable to another. As Ng puts it:

The differences between us and the original New Testament readers are minor. We are really no more different than the Colossians were from the Laodiceans up the road, whose letter they were also to read. We share with both the same theological and moral world, created by God, with the same temptations, struggles, joys and resources, the same salvation, the same Spirit, the same human nature, the same challenge to live worthily of our calling in every facet of our lives. There is no need to be pessimistic about the applicability of the Bible, for in every sense that matters, we are precisely in the same situation as they were. (Ng, 1998:10)

Thus, when Paul speaks to the Corinthians about the unfaithfulness of the Israelites wandering in the desert, he did not seek to put those truths in Corinthian cultural guise in order to guarantee that his audience would understand the point he was making. He simply narrated the wilderness events and then proceeded to apply them immediately to the Corinthian believers, saying that 'these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did' (1 Cor.10:6 cf. v.11). Numerous other incidents could be paraded ad nauseam, to consolidate the point being made here (see e.g. Rom.15:4; Gal.3; 2 Tim.3:14-17).

But if the authors of the Bible can take God's Word given to one culture and apply it directly to another culture with no hint of embarrassment, then there is no need for us, whether in the Pacific or elsewhere, to be ostentatious about seeking cultural outfits for Biblical truths in order to make them comprehensible to people in another culture. Rather, we ought to take to heart the conviction that seems to be the driving force in the evangelistic zeal of Paul in the early church. Without his missionising activities to the Gentiles being hindered by a consideration of the different cultures that he had to cross, he simply





went along armed with the Biblical worldview and his zeal to preach the Gospel message fearlessly in the midst of a pluralistic world, unto all people.

To be sure, his speech to a predominantly Jewish audience in Pisidian Antioch (Acts. 13:16–40) countenanced a different structural and stylistic outlook from his sermon to a predominantly non-Jewish audience in the market place in Athens (Acts.17:22–31). Yet he did not seek to re-dress the Biblical truths in cultural outfits more pertinent to those respective audiences.<sup>12</sup> The Biblical truth that everyone is in need of repentance, for instance, remained true just as much for Athenians as it did for those in Pisidian Antioch, and as it does for those of us in the Pacific in the 21st century.

The cultural, time and theological gaps then, appear to be matters of triviality, to say the very least, in the way they are dealt with by the authors of the Bible. Paul's prime ambition, for example, was simply to set forth the truth plainly, commending himself to every man's conscience 'in the sight of God' (2 Cor.4:2). To be sure, if 'culture' were to be considered a hindrance in seeking to understand the Bible, it should be at the level of exegesis, that is, of working out what the author was communicating to his original audience (e.g. what is Paul actually saying to the Ephesians?). However, in working out how his words to the Ephesians are relevant to us today, culture is not the key, nor is the time gap or the theological gap. For if the Bible is indeed the living Word of God (cf. Heb.4:12), then contextualisation, in the way it has been conducted in Pacific Theology heretofore, marginalises the fundamental truth that in the Bible, 'God is speaking by his Spirit through what he has spoken, God's own message *now as then*' (Ng, 1998:10–11).

Therefore, as serious Bible believers, we ought firmly to uphold the binding nature of the Scriptures in matters of faith and practice and should never be deterred in that conviction by the notion that contextualisation is a necessary step towards effectively communicating God's Word to the contemporary culture. Effective communication

of God's word relies on the power of God's Spirit, which is active within his word, (Isa.55:10; Heb.4:12; 1 Pet.1:23–25) and not on our method of contextualisation. *Soli Deo gloria.*

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This position may seem close to what James Barr (1977:85–9) calls a 'maximal conservatism'. But what is being advocated here is an evangelical Biblical scholarship, which acknowledges that the Christianity that Jesus constituted is in fact a religion of Biblical authority and that the problem with modern Biblical study is its failure to be genuinely scientific—that is to say, fully Biblical in its method (Torrance, 1994:1–11). I must align myself with F.F. Bruce when he says that if 'many of my critical conclusions . . . are described as being conservative . . . they are so . . . because I believe them to be the conclusions to which the evidence points' (cited in Elwell & Weaver, 1999:225, n.31).

<sup>2</sup> For a good discussion of the date of Revelation—which is generally assumed to be the last book of the Bible to be written—see Carson, Moo and Morris (1992:473–6) and the literature cited therein. For dating the New Testament, see Robinson (1976). See also the response by Ellis (1980).

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to a former student of mine now studying in an institution that prepares people for short term missionary work overseas, who provided this information that this is the norm in formal and informal Bible discussions in the institution. Those who would simply share what the Bible says are regarded as 'unspiritual' Christians. Although this practice may not be in line with the formal policy of the institution I am referring to, it is gradually becoming a fad not only in such institutions but also amongst believers who consider themselves 'spiritually baptised' as a second blessing.

<sup>4</sup> Though Tracy has been hailed as the dominant voice of theological postmodernism in America, his theological stance is not easy to pin down. With all due respect to him, what is presented here is how I have been 'provoked' by his thought. For a brief summary of Tracy's overall theological position, see Carson (1996:80–2).

<sup>5</sup> See Tracy (1981:103); see also Tracy (1988); and for a more concise explanation of Tracy's view, McGrath (1993:643).

<sup>6</sup> For other attempts at bridging the hermeneutical gap between us and the Bible, especially the Old Testament, see Goldsworthy (1981:chs 1 & 2). See also Smart (1970:ch. 12). For a more thorough discussion of contemporary hermeneutical situation see Vanhoozer (1998); Thieselton (1992); and Carson (1996:chs 2 & 3).

<sup>7</sup> This has been the position adopted by the Assembly Task Group of the Uniting Church of Australia in 1996, 1997 and even 2004. I am aware of course that this has given way to a position that can be understood as a mild acceptance of



homosexual clergy into the local parishes where the employment of a homosexual priest depends on the local church's decision.

<sup>8</sup> The assumption of the openness of God has developed into a new theological movement championed by notable figures who identified themselves with the Evangelical camp, such as C.H. Pinnock and others (see e.g. Pinnock, 2001; Pinnock et al., 1994). H.W. House and co-authors, responding in defence of traditional Christian theism, have labelled this approach 'neotheism' (see Geisler, House et al., 2001). For a critical review of this book, see Palu (2003a).

<sup>9</sup> For insightful contributions to the understanding of the overarching structure of God's plan in the Bible see Goldsworthy (1981); see also his (1991); Strom (1981); Carson (1996: chs 4–8).

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to the article by Joshua Ng (1998:7–9) for the insights expressed in the following section, where this is explored.

<sup>11</sup> Whether the New Testament authors applied the Old Testament in the right way is beyond the scope of this discussion. Our interest is specifically focused upon the mode in which they applied the past revelation of God to their contemporary situation.

<sup>12</sup> Carson argues compellingly that in his speech in Athens, far from re-dressing Biblical truths in culturally pertinent outfit, Paul first establishes a Biblical framework or worldview in which Jesus himself makes sense to his audience in the Areopagus (see Carson, 2000:394).

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**Rev. Sioeli Kavafolau,  
BD, MTh.**

*Rev. Sioeli Kavafolau is a Tongan and an ordained minister of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. He is a senior lecturer in Christian Theology and Ethics at Sia'atoutai Theological College (STC) since 1997. He studied at STC in 1998-1991 for a Bachelor of Divinity and attained a Master in Theology degree in 2002 at the Pacific Theological College, Fiji.*

## Religion and Secularisation - A Tongan Perspective

### Introduction

This paper is an attempt to assess the secularisation theory in the social and religious context of Tonga, and of course from the perspective of a Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.<sup>1</sup> This paper argues that in Tonga, the validity of the secularisation theory is not quite realised nor verified. I will start with exploring the theory and its relation to globalisation. Then I will proceed to discuss the factors that promote the theory, and followed by a comparative analysis with the cultural factors that may resist the efficacy of the theory.

### 1. Religion *vs.* Secularisation: An Overview

#### 1.1. *Development of Secularisation Theory*

As a social phenomenon, religion is all about imaginative experience. It is employed by society to seek better social relations in terms of values and decision making. This experience, as it is of the sacred, is where one seeks to realise the *best*. Swatos and Christiano characterise the *Homo sapiens* with a sense of dissatisfaction,



thinking of doing better every now and then. This leads to their assertion that "religion is the institution of doing better *par excellence*."<sup>2</sup> This is parallel to John Haught's view of religion as a sense of homelessness: a "journey in quest of true home, of *oikos* realised, of justice done, of things 'on earth as in heaven', of final peace and rest".<sup>3</sup> Human beings, through imaginative experience, encounter an "other" beyond their human limitations as a way to alleviate certain problems including death. Encountering this "other" sanctions their own experience as *better* values. This precisely detains the power of making decisions to the imagination of the individual or the social system – an ideational phenomenon outside the boundary of human beings' real horizon. Subjectivity and abstraction characterises the religious experience. Priests and clergies were venerated by society as people are unified under the belief in *supernova*. The religious influence on society, consequently, overrules the social consciousness and personal commitment of the people. It designs the values and moral standards of society. It provides society with integrative sense of meaning and truth – the dynamics of communication and communal relativity. Social manifestations, in other words, reflect in one way or another religious content of the belief.

However, it was discovered that such imaginative religious authority became increasingly oppressive, as it happened to serve the needs of the minority elite class on the expense of the majority of poor people of the society. The leaders of the church were elite people. They formulate values and decisions with their own interests and for their own benefits. They are the sole beneficiaries of their own decisions and resolutions. Poor people were their hosts, giving donations and offerings every Sunday, for example, just to maintain the *status quo*. To encounter this pressure, society started to acquaint them with another similar institution, yet more liberate to the poor. This starts a process of social differentiation – function as an instrument to redefine values and meanings in a more liberating sense. That competent institution challenges the authority of the church and religion, resulting on the deterioration on the power of the church in society. This is what is known as secularisation.<sup>4</sup>

Rodney Stark, holds the theory of secularisation as being there since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Social intellectuals, he continues, such as Thomas Woolston and Frederick the Great, of the time predicted that there would be an end to the religious influence in Europe; "humans will 'outgrow' belief in the supernatural".<sup>5</sup> This thesis was on its vertex towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aided by the dawn of enlightenment and modernisation. The dynamic power of reason and empirical study confronted the mystical and supernatural power of religious belief. Descartes' rational ontology (viz. "I think, therefore I Am.") reflects a modern category of meaning, based not on traditional values (viz. religious ideal) but on scientific consciousness. This scientific dynamism, along with the process of modernisation, encourages sociologists, such as Auguste Comte, Max Weber, Emil Durkheim, and Karl Marx, to reconsider the place of religion in the social structure of society. Comte announced that an age is coming for social science to be the basis for moral judgments in place of religion.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, Durkheim inferred the shifting in due course the unitive power of the divine to a human constructive phenomenon such as education, human right, and liberation. Marx, with suspicion against religion, did his accusation of religious "false consciousness" which blindfolded the people from their real humanity.<sup>7</sup> All these add up the sociological scientific theory of secularisation.

The theory is taken up by contemporary sociologists in different terms and notions. Luckmann refers to this theory as institutional *differentiation* and *this-worldliness*; Berger and Wilson refers to it as *autonomisation* and *rationalisation*; and for D. A. Martin, he refers to as *pluralisation* and decline in the church religiosity.<sup>8</sup> The fact in this theory is that *the power of influence of religion in the world society is declining as the modern world is institutionally differentiated and pluralised, autonomised and privatised*. Luckmann describes this as the process of lowering the level of transcendence in many new religions – religion became "this worldly" or mundane.<sup>9</sup> The supernatural is brought down to be a natural reality. There is no power outside of society. The power is all within the society *per se*. The society is the sole author of every reality.<sup>10</sup>





Secularisation, therefore, means “no more than that religion ceases to be significant in the working of the social system”.<sup>11</sup> The religious unitive power, the collective consciousness implied by Durkheim<sup>12</sup>, is lost from religion. Its capacity as a jurisdiction that decrees what is right and what is wrong in society is differentiated in forms of pluralistic institutionalised “systems of cognition”.<sup>13</sup> Each sub-social group has its own sub-culture. And each sub-culture has its own sense of meaning and values. Business people, for instance, advocate productivity and profitability in commodities while sports people regard skillfulness and technique orientation as sound values. This is what Peter Berger refers to as the *autonomisation* of the subsystems, viz. the isolation, if not emancipation as Dobbelaere calls it, of social institutions from religious pietism and mysticism.<sup>14</sup>

Is it true that sooner or later in the future, the church in Tonga and the Pacific has no power, even voice in the life of the people and society?

## 2. Impact of Globalisation in the Church in Tonga

There is no doubt that the process of globalisation is impacting on the physical and the social culture of Tonga. Changes in the social culture in Tonga indicate changes in the church as well.

### 2.1 *Logic of Globalisation*

Globalisation is the modernisation of the national and local cultures.<sup>15</sup> It is the upgrading of the so-called third world countries to a standard of life that is materialistically prosperous. The trans-national corporations' pursuit of maximisation of profits pushes through an increasingly borderless world. Values and meanings are understood in terms of productivity and efficiency, and specialisation is the functional model. Individualisation and autonomisation of social subsystems play a crucial role in minimising cost of production, on one hand, and maximising of profit, on the other hand. This ensues, in a pluralistic

and contingent world, that everything is interconnected as they are differentiated from each other in terms of specialisation.

The globalised world is a compressed form of culture in which territorial boundaries is replaced by boundaries of differences.<sup>16</sup> The global logic of putting down the national state in favour of the global market reduces the national state into a mere economic pawn of the G [lobal]-8 countries.<sup>17</sup> In other words, as local culture is complying with global manifestations, erosion of local identity and traditional values is expected.

One of the crucial elements of globalisation is information technology. The increasing universalisation of information by means of internet and e-communication helps to advertise personal interests and commodities in the global market. Coca-Cola and McDonalds, for instances, are icons of private interest and personal greedy. But they are promoted as a universal code in the global market, as information turns up to be a commodity of the product of the two companies. Information is commoditised along with the produced commodities of companies. The information industry is opting also for profit, and sometimes it goes beyond the actual limitation of the item advertised simply to maximise its price in the consumer market. This gap between the information and the actual item widens the gap between the information itself and the consumer. That gap is always a threat, if not oppressive, to the disoriented consumer.

## *2.2 Impacts of Globalisation on the Tongan Society*

The Tongan Islands did not really experience the aroma of modernisation until the 1960s.<sup>18</sup> The production of export commodities was on its feet. Foreign aid came abundantly to the island nation. And, most of all, the inflow of remittance from overseas families and friends increases.<sup>19</sup> A new image of life was accomplished; a new style of living was accommodated, and a new form of culture was realised. The dawn of a new era, Tonga is *modernised* and the people are *civilised*<sup>20</sup>.



Most of those modernised premises are parts of the parcel of globalisation. They are the light (electricity), tele-communication and later e-communication, education, health and medicare, and wharf. Banking, sports, and hotels are later factors.

These developments were results of economic trade and commercial transactions. Trading was not part of the traditional values, though there were forms of trading in ancient Tongan, like canoe building skills, club carvings and sculpturing. Cummins assures that it was done only on national level rather than on the individual level.<sup>21</sup> It is a new shift of economic system in Tonga, viz. from subsistence economy to trading economy. Economy of sharing is suspended by economy of profits and accumulation (cf. Daly and Cobb's chrematistic model<sup>22</sup>).

This leads to the issue of alienating the rural area and remote islands. It stimulates urban migration, both from the rural area of Tongatapu and from remote islands, like Ha'apai and Vava'u. People struggle for better education, better jobs with guaranteed good money and promising life. As wealth concentrated in one place, the other places normally facing *economic alienation*. (Actually, most of the people who remain on the islands are the old generation and unemployed).

Cheap labor in Tonga, as in many third world countries, is one of the factors that attracted some foreign investors and businesses. This introduced an environment where people's experience and skills are normatively heightened to befit the commercial pursuits. This involves changes in life styles especially in daily routine.

In social changes, Keith L. Morton describes the social solidarity of Tongan society to be economically motivated. He holds that the social ties were maintained to compensate their lack of confidence in any income from participation in any commercial economy.<sup>23</sup> This sense of togetherness and interdependence can easily fade as the technology of economy, especially in commercial trade, is stabilised. That is what is actually happening in Tonga today. The commercial system has been

stabilised, and trading and production are intensively operated in a reliable and consistent strategy. Social bonds are now atomized and individualised. Traditional extended families are scaled down to immediate nuclear members only.

*Emigration and mobility* are another impacts of globalisation in Tonga. George Marcus estimated in 1993 that the number of Tongans permanently living in overseas, especially in New Zealand, Australia, and in the United States of America, is more than the current nine thousand plus living in the kingdom.<sup>24</sup> The remittance from those people not only relieved the economic situation of the kingdom, but also configured the economic and social structure of the kingdom. In terms of mobility, moving in and out has both good and bad things..

Cultural changes are a part of the global impact. As new equipment and goods are introduced in to the country, new languages and words are introduced so as to acquaint the global culture. Some examples are "pepa" for paper, "misini" for machine, "ka" for car, "komipiuta" for computer, e-mail for e-mail, Internet for Internet, etc. A *global culture and language* is experienced where the social sense of community is replaced by the economic sense of privacy and individuality.

Part of this is the transformation that took place in the social system of cognition or understanding. Local organisation is household centered and social relations beyond the household tend to be optative, temporary, and ad hoc. These characteristics are the emerging form of social relations at the local level and constitute a trend toward atomisation.<sup>25</sup> Ernst describes the situation as follows:

The old model of social relationships which was characterised by respect for the wisdom and authority of the older people and chiefs is increasingly challenged by the model of modern western societies with the nuclear family in its center and individual work and



material wealth as points of reference. The well being of the extended families is losing its all-embracing significance because it is increasingly perceived as a hindrance to individual progress.<sup>26</sup>

The value system in Tonga was determined religiously.<sup>27</sup> Taboos and ceremonial behaviors were basic to the values and moralities of Tongans. With the rise of globalisation, a new moral cognition is imposed. What is moral is defined according to its degree of productivity and ability to gain maximum profit.

It is a real threat to Tongan communal values, and may result in a communal paralysis. The functional elements of Tongan society are institutionalised and autonomised<sup>28</sup> to enhance production, yet entails individual alienation. Rich become richer while poor become poorer. This economic gap provides a cesspool of corruption and immoralities. Drug abuse, alcohol taking, prostitution, suicide, homicide, and many other inductive types of behavior are all done in pursuance of some sort of living competent with global expectation of life, such as better education, food, clothes, etc. A new type of values integrated to the traditional values, viz. *global values*. Everyone is expected to perform according to what is expected in the market. The axiom of "Time is money and money is life" reflects the content of that expectation.

### 3. Secularisation and Religion in Tonga

The efficacy of the secularisation theory in the context of Tonga is totally in a state of doubt and distrust. The bulk of the theory lies in the power of modernisation, viz. natural resources<sup>29</sup> and economic raw materials. As Stark summarises the theory, modernisation is the causal engine dragging the gods into retirement.<sup>30</sup> This implies that the theory can be true only if the process of modernisation is still on its feet and in an increasing rate of progression. This is exactly what seems to be undecided in Tonga.

### *3.1 Factors that Promote Theory of Secularisation*

Only two major factors I would like to highlight in this discussion. First, the degree of *disorientation* realised in the local people's attitude to the global culture. Consider the fact that the local people were not having a special pre-orientation to the western civilisation and modern way of life. The introduction of money-oriented type of living needs some common skills in budgeting and commerce. Living with videos and television needs certain kind of counseling and basic guidance, especially to young generation. Unfortunately, a small percentage of the people in Tonga have access to those demands. This leads to the fascination and enchantment of the material world – seeking values and life in the social relationship with commodities and means of production. This can be identified in some level in Tonga, especially among the elite. They eventually cease to go to church on Sundays, spend their time touring island resorts or doing their own thing at home or in their plantations.

The other factor is dealing with the natural capacity of the group to host the global mechanism. Disorientation denotes that the society of Tonga is a premature born child to the world of globalisation and modernisation. Globalisation takes advantage of this prematurity to cultivate its ideology. Lack of experience, knowledge, understanding, and security may throw the trust and belief of the premature local people into the economic and scientific campaign of globalisation and modernisation. This, though, is a sign of dehumanisation, which can also mean a disenchantment of religion.

### *3.2 Factors that Hinder Theory of Secularisation*

First, the lack of raw materials in Tonga indicates that the chance of modernisation dynamic is also less in Tonga. Limited resources of the country cannot guarantee the effect of secularisation, as the future of modernisation campaign through globalisation, is totally unsecured. Tonga was and still is a religious society partly because of that deficiency. As is natural to people of despair, they always seek religious spirituality in some kind of consciousness as they face the challenges of the situation. As the economic pool is getting away in due course, there is a



hope that the people will be more religious as ever.<sup>31</sup> Religious denominations in Tonga have no share in the government annual budget. The only source of income for the church, especially the local denominations such as the Free Wesleyan Church, and the Church of Tonga, is its members. This depicts the fact that the natural or physical image of the church now reflects the level or degree of commitment and participation of the people to the church in Tonga. In fact, it is becoming more and more regardless of the process of modernisation.

Secondly, we are in a world where life everywhere is affected, in one way or another, by *globalism* as it ignores the national boundaries. This creates local suspicion as they encounter the global culture. Signs of anti-globalism emerge, such as contextualism, ethnicisation and primitivism. Schreiter calls these as cultural logics<sup>32</sup>, in which claiming of local identity is at stake. As Young says, "Fixity of identity is only sought in situations of instability and disruption, of conflict and change".<sup>33</sup> This tension between global and local indicates the willingness of the people to maintain their religious identity as integral part of their local, if not traditional identity. In other words, the global cannot completely invade the local culture. Stevens-Arroyo is right in saying,

Unlike similar migrations or cultural encounters of previous generations, wherein assimilation to the receiving society was almost inescapable, contemporary groups often learn how to protect their particular values aggressively by using the most of the communication technologies.<sup>34</sup>

There is an irresistible degree of assimilation of the receiving culture but to the point where the global culture can be utilised to uphold and protect their particular values and identity. That is to say, that the migrants are taking the cognitive system of globalisation as an instrument of identifying the peripheral values with the central cultures [viz. the global culture].

Thirdly, in a society where the economy is highly dependent on non-fix resources such as relationships, unity and community is very important.<sup>35</sup> Sense of unity in Tonga is part of the religious life, particularly worship. To become one is to become religious. Tongans hardly abandon religious identity since it keeps them in relation with each other even geographically separated in terms of migration. Memory is a central factor in this point. Those in overseas remember those at home by sending money and other gifts. Part of that memory is the putting up of own ethnic church to kindle the spirituality of remembering home and alleviate the tension of missing home.

Last, not the least is the more realistic of theology in modern era. I refer here to the model of contextualisation and the attempt to make the gospel sense to the people in a more realistic situation. The theological awareness of human rights and cosmological/ecological cognizance ameliorates the trust and belief of the people in religious spirituality.

## Conclusion

The Reductionists' prediction of the fade of religion is nothing but a myth. Human beings, even with the hands of science and technologies, cannot escape limitation and contingency. We are living in a world of limitation. The proud of modernisation, *viz.* the power of science and reason, will fade, as religion is its reciprocal. Robert Jastrow, a leading scientist and astronomer in the NASA, describes his scientific experience as follows:

At this moment, it seems as though science will never be able to raise the curtain on the mystery of creation. For the scientist who has lived his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountains of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.<sup>36</sup>





A Reductionist theory of religion has no substantial foundation as we move to the future. (Dehumanisation occurs to only few of the entire world population, that is the labours only). Still the submerge majority put belief in some sort of religious consciousness. Number of church attendance cannot predict the actual degree of religiosity of society as there are some home-base religions and some sort of individual piety.<sup>37</sup>

There is a tendency in Tonga and its context to resist the efficacy of the secularisation theory. The situation of economic dependency, reclaiming of identity, religious sense of unity, and the contextual understanding of the gospel put up a very strong fort against the power of secularisation and dehumanisation in terms of modernisation and globalisation.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I refer here merely to my social position as a member of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga. Yet does not confine my discussion of the issue to the Free Wesleyan Church only.

<sup>2</sup> William H. Swatos, Jr. and Kevin J. Christiano, "Secularization Theory", in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:3, 224.

<sup>3</sup> John Haught, "Religious and Cosmic Homelessness: Some Environmental Implications", in Charles Birch, et.al. (eds), *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 161. Quoted by Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 192.

<sup>4</sup> Swatos and Christiano, 225.

<sup>5</sup> Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.", in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:3, 249.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in R. A. Bauer, *The New Man in Soviet Psychology*, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), 132.

<sup>8</sup> Karel Dobbelaere, "Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization", in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:3, 230.

<sup>9</sup> Cited by Dobbelaere, 235.

<sup>10</sup> *Sociology of Religion: A Reader*, Part I, 53.

<sup>11</sup> B. R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment*, (London: Watts, 1969), quoted by Dobbelaere, 232.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 239. See Durkheim's idea of "collective conscience" in "Emile Durkheim", Microsoft ® Encarte ® 99 Encyclopedia. © 1993-1998 Microsoft Corporation, in *Sociology of Religion, A Reader: Part I*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to the system of value judgment implementing by each institutionalized social group in the society.

<sup>14</sup> Cited by Dobbelaere, 231.

<sup>15</sup> I am aware that the definition of *globalization* depends on point of emphasis one holds as he or she approaches the issue. However, I like to use Robert Schreiter's framework of realizing the term – viz. globalization is the "extension of modernity and the compression of the world". See Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between Global and Local*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 9-12.

<sup>16</sup> Schreiter, 46.

<sup>17</sup> Akuila Yabaki, "Globalization and Its Impact on Culture and Tradition: Pre-Coup Fiji", in *The Pacific Journal of Theology* II/ 24 (2000), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Only few Tongans foretaste modernization but in very limited terms such as building materials, education, and other domestic utensils. As brought about by the missionaries and Europeans who settled in the Island by that time of European contact, these materials were available only to the chiefly people and some of well educated commoners.

<sup>19</sup> Emigration to overseas countries was very rare before the late sixties. The period between 1969 – 1975, is marked by Tongan sociologists, including Edgar Tu'inukuafe, as the period when most of the Tongan people moved to overseas countries, especially New Zealand and Australia. See E. Tu'inukuafe, "Tongans in New Zealand – A Brief Study", in *Tongan Culture and History*, (ed) Phyllis Herda, et. al., (Australia: Department of Pacific and Southeast Asian History, 1990), 206.

<sup>20</sup> The terms *modernization* and *civilization* are used here in their full sense of meaning as pertaining to the idea of culture. That is to say that they are not confined to material development only but include the ideational and performantial aspect of change.

<sup>21</sup> H. G. Cummins, "Tonga Society at the Time of European Contact", in Noel Rutherford (ed), *Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press: 1977), 80.

<sup>22</sup> Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., *For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988, 1994), 138ff.

<sup>23</sup> Keith L. Morton, "The Atomization of Tongan Society", in *Pacific Studies* 10/2 (March 1987), 50.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Kerry James, "Reading the Leaves: The Role of Tongan Women's Traditional Wealth and Other "Contraflows" in the Process of Modern Migration and Remittance", in *Pacific Studies* 20/1 (March 1999), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Morton, 48-49.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst, 241.



<sup>27</sup> H. G. Cummins, "Tonga Society at the Time of European Contact", in Noel Rutherford (ed), *Friendly Islands: A History of Tonga*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press: 1977), 84-86.

<sup>28</sup> This word was coined by Peter Berger to refer to the isolation of the society subsystems from religious consciousness. Cited by Karel Dobbelaere, "Towards an Integrated Perspective of the Processes Related to the Descriptive Concept of Secularization", in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:3, 230.

<sup>29</sup> This refers to material as well as ideational resources, such as rationality and scientific kind of thinking.

<sup>30</sup> Rodney Stark, "Secularization, R.I.P.", in *Sociology of Religion* 1999, 60:3, 251.

<sup>31</sup> This argument can be illustrated by the returning of the people of the United States to church after the terrorist event of the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. A life of despair needs nothing but a spiritual consciousness.

<sup>32</sup> Schreiter, 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* [London: Routledge, 1995, p. 4], quoted in Schreiter, 119.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "Syncretic Sociology: Towards a Cross-Disciplinary Study of Religion", in *Sociology of Religion* 1998, 59:3, 223.

<sup>35</sup> Rodney C. Hills, "Predicaments in Polynesia: Culture and Constitutions in Western Samoa and Tonga", in *Pacific Studies* (16:4) December 1993, 126.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation Versus Chaos: The Reinterpretation of Mythical; Symbolism in the Bible*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 181.

<sup>37</sup> Stark, 251-252.

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*Sociology of Religion: A Reader*, Part I.

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# A Religion Factor in the Causes and Consequences of Conflict

*(Paper presented at the Fiji NGO Coalition Consultation on the theme  
"From Reaction to Prevention: Civil Society Forging Partnerships to Prevent  
Conflicts and Build Peace")*

*Pacific Theological College (PTC), Suva on 14 March, 2005)*

## Introduction

Why has religion suddenly emerged as a major factor in violent conflicts around the world towards the end of the last century and in the early part of this century, and why has it become influential in general election outcomes? The cases of Fiji in 2001 and the US in 2004 are classic examples of religion – the Christian right – having an influential role in determining electoral outcomes.

Religion has undoubtedly done and continues to do so much good in this world. But it also has the potential to give people a reason to sacrifice themselves for a cause that is as noble and as old as humankind, namely the defence of identity. In this presentation, I wish to share my view that religion is as much a factor in conflict as it is in preventing, resolving and transforming conflict.

## The Religion Factor

Perhaps the most unexpected phenomenon of our time is the resurgence of religion as an indirect consequence



**Aisake Casimira**

*Director, Ecumenical  
Centre for Research,  
Education and Advocacy  
(ECEA); with  
background in sociology and  
theology. He is a member  
of the Editorial Board of  
the Pacific Journal of  
Theology published by the  
South Pacific Association  
of Theological Schools  
(SPATS)*

of globalisation. If there is one thing that western liberal thinkers agree upon, it is that religion has run its course. If so, then what is to be the basis of a society no longer united by a single religious faith?

Modernity was born and from it flowed some of the most brilliant ideas ever constructed in western thought: Descartes' systematic doubting of every single received truth; Copernicus, Galileo and especially Newton's view that experiments could establish truth and reason would dispel prejudice; ethics could be constructed on new foundations; in human emotions (Hume) or rationality (Kant) or the maximisation of beneficial consequences (Bentham).<sup>1</sup> Salvation evolved into the new and powerful idea of progress and was no longer vested in the straight and narrow of religious morality.

For over four centuries, the western world proceeded on the assumption that science, politics and economics would take the place once held by religion. The problem of religion would be solved by depriving it of power. Locke's doctrine of toleration led the way to the separation of the Church and State and the secularisation of politics. Religion might survive in the private places of the soul, the family or the congregation, but its public role was at an end.

The strange fact was that despite the assertion of rationality, religion refuses to die and the question is, what would happen when religion returns in all its power – precisely because it answers questions to which science, politics and economics offer no reply? In fact, religion has returned to the world stage with such basic force during the close of the last century as in the case of Bosnia and Kosovo and early this century with the terror bombings in the US and Bali, and the senseless invasion of Iraq. These conflicts have, among other factors, religious nuances.

In our context, this is not new. The Christian religion or a version of it was invoked to mobilise popular support and passion for the 1987 and 2000 coups, and to justify racially biased statements made in both Houses of Parliament since 2001. It was allegedly used to canvass

support for the *Sogosogo Duavata na Lewe ni Vanua* (SDL) political party during the 2001 general elections. It was also alleged that the establishment of the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF) was no coincidence but to help the SDL political party win the 2001 elections. While there were no clear correlations between religious resentment and the desecration of places of worship, it would be very naïve to leave it to antiquity, more so now in view of the Christian State proposal.

Why are people so gullible and why do they become easy prey to racially divisive and exclusive politics? There is no single answer, but I suspect that a broad explanation is not hard to find. Globalisation is profoundly unsettling. Faced with not only dramatic but also traumatic changes, those who feel deeply threatened by it turn to religion as a source of stability, an expression of the things that do not change. Religion offers an explanation of who we are and why, and the meaning of events as they unfold around us. That, I suspect, is what is happening in our context. But what it does is to intensify the search for certainty of identity and belonging, and there is a link between the search for belonging and violence. Writes Michael Ignatieff,

The more strongly you feel the bonds of belonging to your own group, the more hostile, and the more violent will your feelings be towards outsiders. You can't have this intensity of belonging without violence, because belonging of this intensity moulds the individual conscience.<sup>2</sup>

The power of religion in our contemporary society lies in its ability to offer answers to the big questions of 'who' and 'why'. Our religious leaders might think that this is a good thing, and in many ways it is. But it is precisely now that they should be warned of the dangers ahead. As systems of meaning and purpose, the great religions that we have, have never been surpassed. As substitutes for politics, as proposed by supporters of the 'Christian State' proposal, they are full of danger. There are some combinations that are incendiary, and the mixture of religion and political power is one of them.

The great tragedies of the last century came when politics was turned into a religion, when the nation (in the case of fascism) or system (communism) or, in our case, ideology (indigenous Fijian paramountcy) was absolutised and turned into a god. The greatest threat to us now is that the opposite may happen: not when politics is religionised but when religion is politicised. This is exactly the danger that the Christian State proposal poses. I would suggest that we stand strongly against this proposal, not through violence, but through the strength of our appeal to the lessons of history and sound reasoned arguments. Moreover, it is through a life lived with compassion and concern for others and those in need, regardless of race and religion, that Christian values are appreciated and valued, not through forcing them onto the adherents of other religions.

The role of the Christian Churches, in this instance, is to do what Apimeleki Qiliho suggests:

The Church must speak the silent cry of those among us who today suffer from need, hunger, disease, powerlessness and lack of freedom. Giving voice to the voiceless, since the days of the Prophets and Jesus, has been a classic task of our faith tradition and one of its most majestic virtues.<sup>3</sup>

Even Karl Marx, one of religion's greatest critics, noted that religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion, he says, "is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, the soul of the soulless conditions."<sup>4</sup>

Religion means to bind and that is what religions did and still do. They bind people to one another and to God. But they also do more than offer a vision of the good. Says Jonathan Sacks,





religions ... embody good in the life of a community, by making it vivid and substantial in prayer and ritual, in compelling narratives and collective acts of rededication, and by binding groups of people through collective ceremonies and symbols. At their heart is a vision of a unity, an entity, a whole.<sup>5</sup>

Difference is where politics lives; but it is what religion transcends. While religion binds differences, politics mediates differences. And this is what our leaders need to understand.

More than any other actor on the international stage, religion fulfils the twenty-first century imperative *'think globally, act locally'*. Its vision is global but its setting is local – the congregation, the temple, the mosque and church. The question is: are religions ready for perhaps the greatest challenge they have ever faced, namely, a world in which even local conflict can have global repercussions? It is one thing for Christians and Muslims to fight one another in the age of the Crusades; quite another to do so in an age of nuclear and biological weapons. It was one thing for religious wars to take place in a battlefield, quite another when anywhere, even a bus or plane could become the scene of terror and horror.

Needless to say, religions do not always agree with one another or with secular philosophies when it comes to the great moral issues of our time: abortion, poverty, war, issues of sexuality, euthanasia, stem-cell research and cloning. It is this very potential for bitter conflict that leads people to embrace moral relativism on the one hand (if religions do not agree then morality is a mere choice) and libertarianism on the other (society should not pass collective judgement on moral matters; morality is a private affair). Both of these positions are, I believe, false. We argue about morality in a way, and with such seriousness, about matters that really are relative (how to dress for a night out at the Barn, for example). And we do not truly believe that moral issues are private – if we did, there would be no protest on human rights issues, on the

coup, sexual and physical abuse of women and children, corruption, no public moral debate at all. Yet the question is urgent: how do religions live with moral difference and yet sustain an overarching community?

There may be no way of eliminating the objective conditions that create potential insecurity and conflict. I believe we are entering this new century whose trajectory is radically unpredictable. And the very freedoms we value make it so. However, I would argue that we have intellectual and moral resources that should enable us to cope with it. The most important is a moral vision. That is what the immediate post-independence period had and what today we sadly lack. It was what enabled the late Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara to instil a sense of optimism and a spirit of multiculturalism and nationhood (*'Fiji is home to all'*). When used today – most notably by Ratu Joni Madraiwiwi, Archbishop Petero Mataka, and Commodore Frank Bainimarama – in invoking ideas of truth, justice and reconciliation to heal the wounds of 2000 – it (moral vision) still retains its pristine power.

We need such a moral template today. We can progress at any speed as long as we know where we are going. It is when we lose a sense of this moral vision that people turn to populist leaders capable of manipulating public fear, as we saw during the 1987 and 2000 coups, or to regressive identities that allow them to cope with fear by blaming other groups of people for being the cause of their woes. We have seen this happen and sadly it continues to beset our politics and political debates.

What a moral vision restores to us is the idea of responsibility – that what we do, individually and collectively, makes a difference, and that the future lies in our hands. Every era has produced its own cosmic view to show that what happens could not have been otherwise; that it is useless to believe that we can fight against fate. All that can be done is to align ourselves to its flow, exploit it when we can, and render ourselves indifferent to our fate when we cannot. It is what Thomas Friedman calls the “golden straitjacket”.<sup>6</sup> There is no choice but to join and live, or stand aloof and perish.



This way of thinking is a regression to a view of the universe that is very ancient indeed. It is the world of myth, in which we are alone in an environment dominated by irresistible forces blind to our presence and deaf to our prayers and hopes. I am convinced that such ideas and thoughts formulate much of the thinking behind arguments for racial politics, the view that race will continue to dominate our politics for a long time yet, as the Prime Minister is so fond of saying, or the stance that we are not ready for a non-indigenous Prime Minister, as stated by the extreme nationalists. This is precisely the thinking of a besieged mentality; one that believes that the human condition is essentially tragic and, hence, human life is anything but a tragedy. So, they would argue that we do not need to change the way things are because it essentially does not alter our fate.

As I have mentioned elsewhere, I believe that the great leap of the Judeo-Christian imagination was to argue otherwise.<sup>7</sup> Our hopes are not mere dreams, nor our ideals illusions. Something at the heart of our being invites us to exercise our freedom by shaping families, communities and our society in such a way as to honour the image of God in us and others, and to promote human dignity. This view, shared by the great religions we have, sees choice, action and moral responsibility at the heart of being human, and these lie within ourselves and not outside of us. Ours is the responsibility to make this world a lot better than what we inherited. We are not powerless in the face of fate. That is the essential message. The task is not without guidance of our faith traditions. As Apimeleki Qiliho writes,

The great faith traditions remind us that we are not alone, nor are we bereft of guidance from the past. The sheer tenacity of these traditions – so much longer-lived than political systems and ideologies – suggest that they speak to something enduring in the [sic] human character...<sup>8</sup>

There is nothing benign about our politics of race; it is a defeatist and determinist politics.

I believe that the above view, opposed by determinists such as the SDL Coalition government and party officials, and those who stand to gain from keeping people apart, is not merely true but necessary if we are to transform our racially divisive and exclusive politics that breeds insecurity and fear between our people. Reason and education did not stop Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka in 1987 and George Speight in 2000 from storming into parliament and ousting elected governments. Neither did reason and education help to dispel racial prejudice, seen during debates in both Houses of Parliament in recent years, nor deter those in government from pursuing racially exclusive policies such as that of affirmative action. The point is that reason and education are not enough but need to be anchored by a moral vision.

It is my belief that religious leaders can no longer assume that nothing has changed in the condition of our people. Something has changed; our power for good and evil, and the sheer reach and consequences of our interventions. We have come face to face with the 'stranger', and it makes all the difference whether we find this threatening or enriching.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, as Petero Mataka says,

The test of reconciliation, indeed of faith, is whether we, as Christians, can make space for others who are different. Can we recognise the image of God in those whose languages, cultures and faiths, are different from ours? If we cannot, "then we make God in our own image instead of allowing him to remake us in his."<sup>10</sup>

The great religions we have, have within themselves harsh texts which, read literally, can be taken to endorse narrow particularism, suspicion of strangers, and intolerance toward those who believe differently than they do. They also have within themselves sources that stress kinship with the stranger, empathy with the outsider, and courage that leads people to extend a hand across boundaries of estrangement or hostility. The choice is, will the generous texts in each religion serve as interpretive keys to the rest, or will the abrasive passages determine our ideas of who we are and what we are called on to do?



There is also another urgent reason why religions need to enter into dialogue with one another: the emergence of religious extremism within themselves. When we hear politicians invoking religious sentiments or religious leaders calling for conversion crusades, we may not see the last of 2000. Especially when poverty stricken and oppressed groups of people, often used by those who have the means and power, will respond violently. But what this means is that each of us who belong to a faith must wrestle with the sources of extremism within our own faiths.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

In this presentation, I have alluded to religion as a factor in conflict. I have also highlighted the potential of religion for conflict prevention, resolution and transformation. The primary lesson is that religion speaks to and answers the 'who' and 'why' questions of people. That is its blessing as well as its curse, and our religious leaders must be well aware of this when they make interventions.

The crux of what I am trying to say is that if we cherish our own faith and culture, then we will understand the value of these to those whose faith and culture are different from ours. But, writes Akuila Yabaki, "if faith and culture are mere burdens, not only will we not value ours, neither will we value the faith and culture of someone else."<sup>12</sup> I believe that understanding the particularity of what matters to us is the best way of coming to appreciate what matters to others.

Thank you all for listening!

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, London New York, Continuum, 2002, pg178

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging*, London, Viking, 1993, pg188

<sup>3</sup> *Sunday Sun*, Sunday 13 February, 2005, pg12

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Don Cupitt's *The Sea of Faith*, London, BBC, 1984, pg139

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, London New York, Continuum, 2002, pg106

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, London: HarperCollins, 2000, pp101-11

<sup>7</sup> *The Fiji Times*, 11 November, 2003, pg7

<sup>8</sup> *Sunday Sun*, Sunday 13 February, 2005, pg12

<sup>9</sup> Akuila Yabaki adequately dealt with the issue of the 'stranger' in his paper titled *Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities*, A Presentation at an International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief organised symposium on "Internal Law and Religious Symposium" (unpublished), Brigham Young University, 2004 pp7-8

<sup>10</sup> Petero Mataca, *Implications of the Vice President's trial and sentencing on forgiveness and the role of the BLV*, A submission to the September meeting of the Great Council of Chiefs (unpublished), 2004, pg4. See also Akuila Yabaki's *Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities*, A Presentation at an International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief organised symposium on "Internal Law and Religious Symposium" (unpublished), Brigham Young University, 2004, pp8-9 where he raised a similar point about making space for the other.

<sup>11</sup> Akuila Yabaki's *Religion in the Public Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities*, A Presentation at an International Academy for Freedom of Religion and Belief organised symposium on "Internal Law and Religious Symposium" (unpublished), Brigham Young University, 2004, pg7

<sup>12</sup> *ibid* pg9



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**Tessa Mackenzie**

*Tessa Mackenzie is presently Chairperson of the Editorial Board of the Pacific Journal of Theology - a service she has voluntarily granted to SPATS for over the last fifteen years. She is also part-time Lecturer at the St. John the Baptist Theological College in the Diocese of Polynesia, Suva, Fiji.*

## Building Religious Tolerance in Fiji

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### The religious environment in Fiji

Among the general populace of all religious traditions in Fiji there is a broad understanding of people's religious beliefs and observances, but this is somewhat superficial. Religious prejudices built on lack of knowledge and understanding of others' beliefs, and sometimes on deliberate misinformation, are latent throughout all Fiji's communities.

For one hundred and twenty five years the three major religions present in Fiji, namely Christianity, Hinduism and Islam, have co-existed. According to the most recent census (1996) of nine years ago, Christians make up just over half the population, one-third are followers of Hinduism, and ten per cent are Muslims. During the colonial period and through the first years of independence little was done to develop the then prevailing tolerance or lack of concern into deeper and better informed respect. The colonial history and the policies of racial segregation practised by the British had conditioned the people of Fiji





to live in separate compartments, which first began to be relaxed only as recently as the 1960s. Because the racial divide is largely the religious divide—most ethnic Fijians are Christian and most Indo-Fijians are Hindu or Muslim—there has been a tendency for the religions to be isolated from one another.

The Christian Church, however, has always emphasised evangelism and the need to convert others. This has meant that those crossing over from one set of beliefs to another have had a significant impact on inter-religious understanding. Because Hinduism is as much a way of life as a religion and is an integral part of the culture of the Indo-Fijian Hindu, the brand of Christianity presented to converts has demanded a radical and complete break with the past, causing alienation and what at times manifests itself as hatred for Hinduism in Hindus who have become Christian. It is also true that early Indo-Fijian conversions to Christianity resulted in ostracism of those converts by their fellow Indo-Fijians. 'An Indian in becoming a Christian, they believe, ceases to be an Indian', reported Hannah Dudley in 1898 (Sidal, 1997:134).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the rate of urbanisation in Fiji rose and mixing of the two major ethnic groups became more common. Political leaders became increasingly likely to promote multi-culturalism and multi-racialism, at least rhetorically, and tolerance, including religious tolerance, was growing.

The coup d'état of 1987 brought the latent prejudices of Christians out into the open, as the coup leaders declared that their actions were in response to the call of God. The use of God and Christianity, or rather a Fijian Methodist version of Christianity, to justify the coup was based on an understanding of certain parts of the Old Testament scriptures in the Bible. As Dr I.S.Tuwere and others have pointed out, the relationship between Methodist Christianity and Fijian culture has become so close that it is difficult to differentiate between them (2002:100). The claim has been made that the Fijian people are one of the 'lost tribes of Israel' and there has been continual preaching from Methodist pulpits that Fijians are God's 'Chosen People' and Fiji is

their 'Promised Land'. This has naturally fuelled Fijian nationalist aspirations and has meant that Indo-Fijians are kept permanently in the status of vulagi, or visitors.<sup>1</sup> Old Testament texts that condemn idols and idol worshippers have been given prominence, leading to prejudice against Hindus in particular. In 1987 parallels were drawn between the actions of the coup perpetrators and the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Exodus), giving divine sanction to the coup and portraying Rabuka as a Moses delivering Fijians from bondage by 'heathen races'. Fijian chiefs were interpreted, through the use of Biblical texts such as Romans 13:1-2, as being appointed by God.

As a result of this use of religion to justify the political situation there was an outbreak of intolerance against Hinduism. At the height of the post-coup troubles individual Hindus suffered persecution. The introduction of the so-called Sunday Ban legislation, which prevented activities or movement on Sundays except for Christian worship, affected Indo-Fijians, who were in the habit of using Sunday for family visiting and outings, and even Christians who were not Methodists were prevented from travelling to their respective Churches. Temples were burnt, holy books and sacred items were destroyed, and idols were smashed. Sporadic outbreaks of temple desecration have continued, with varying intensity, up to the present time. Police attempts to downplay the religious aspect by declaring some temple invasions to be purely burglary does not take into account the fact that *any* unauthorised entry into and touching of what is considered sacred is a form of desecration. The turmoil of 1987 also saw the beginnings of a determined advocacy of the idea that Fiji should be declared a Christian state.

Since 1987 another factor has influenced Christianity in Fiji. This is the intensification of the activity of Pentecostal groups from the United States that have entered Fiji bringing a ground swell in fundamentalist teachings. The coup d'état of 2000, though different in some aspects from that of 1987, also had a strong religious tone, with Christian worship taking place frequently among the people occupying the Parliamentary complex. Subsequent to this coup the Assembly of Christian Churches of Fiji was formed. It brings together the more



fundamentalist Churches and it has sought to supersede the Fiji Council of Churches. This assembly has a close relationship with the Government Ministry set up to promote national unity and reconciliation. A Year of Prayer and Fasting and the present (2005) Year of Forgiveness allow only limited space for other religions to take part in organised Days and Weeks. The most recent example of this type of Government thinking was a Church service, solely Christian, included in the day of celebrations for the victory of the Rugby Sevens in Hong Kong, yet people from all walks of life and religions were celebrating the win, and the victory was cited, not without grounds, as a strongly unifying force in the national life.

In contrast there is the work of the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education, and Advocacy (ECREA; originally the Fiji Council of Churches' Research Group) which promotes a more inclusive variety of Christian theology. Archbishop Mataka of the Roman Catholic Church has been the most prominent Christian voice urging tolerance and he has been supported by the Anglican Bishop, Jabez Bryce.

Interfaith Search Fiji, which was formed in 1987, has sought to build bridges of respect and understanding, through dialogue and through educational programmes, for the sake of the wider community. This organisation voices concern whenever there are incidents of religious intolerance.

## Causes of religious intolerance

The discussion has already identified some of the causes of religious intolerance in Fiji. The dictionary definition of the word tolerance is to bear; to endure; to allow to exist. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* adds, 'to forbear to judge harshly or rigorously (person, religious sect, opinion)'. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* states, 'Religious tolerance is the leaving undisturbed of those whose faith and practice are other than one's own. It may arise from respect for the rights of another person to freedom of belief, or from

indifference.' It also adds, 'Christianity, with its claim to be the only true religion, is dogmatically intolerant'.

Intolerance arises when people are being judgemental. It is very easy to judge others by outward appearances. The forms of worship and practices in religions other than one's own may seem strange, different and not easily acceptable. It is the outward signs and the rituals and ceremonies that cause condemnation of others. Such judgement is passed without understanding, and is irrational, because it is based on fear of the unknown. This is prejudice, or pre-judgement, based on ignorance and fear, and it causes others to be shunned, shut out or avoided (at the least), and it can lead to hostile or self-righteous violence.

Past history has seen many examples of this, notably the time of the Christian Crusades between 1095 and 1272, when for two hundred years Christians went to war to exterminate Islam on the grounds of religion, labelling Muslims as infidels or unbelievers. Holy wars such as the Crusades, where religion is the cause of and justification for violence, also have a political and economic agenda that may be more or less covert; indeed, many of the faithful and committed fighters may scarcely be aware of these dimensions of the struggle. The Crusading nations wanted possession of the land occupied by Muslims, to which they claimed ownership on the grounds of its sacred connections with the life of Jesus Christ, but they also wanted the trade routes. However, the same geographical area is also sacred to Islam. Now, in the twentieth/ twenty-first century, the same area cherished by Christians as the cradle of their religion is still claimed to be sacred by Jews and Muslims. Both sides wish to establish a nation state of their own, and politics and economics, mixed with religion, results in a volatile and violent situation. Fear lies at the root of such violence—fear of loss of land and space to live, fear of being deprived of the means of economic survival, and fear of being overwhelmed by the 'other'. Religious beliefs and a person's faith are deeply personal and precious. Anything that threatens beliefs can cause violent reaction, as exemplified in the suicidal actions of desperate modern Islamic youths.



Religious intolerance is caused by prejudice born out of ignorance; fear of the unknown; and by perceived threats to one's personal faith, one's identity and one's livelihood.

## The promotion of religious intolerance by Christians

The exclusive claims of Christianity are the basis of Christian intolerance of other religions. Christianity has always been a proselytising religion, because it grew out of Judaism. The first Christians were compelled by circumstance to recruit others to their group and their way of thinking. This began with attempts to convert their fellow Jews to their understanding of what God had done in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and how this fulfilled the promises of Judaism for the Reign of God. 'All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that this Jesus, whom you crucified, is the one that God has made Lord and Messiah' (Acts 2:36). Christianity quickly spread out into the surrounding Graeco-Roman culture with a message of hope for new life, in a civilisation that was hedonistic and fatalistic. This rapid spread led to persecution of Christians first by the Jewish authorities and later by the Romans, and is to some extent the reason for the exclusive nature of some of the claims made for Christianity in the New Testament.

Christianity, coming from the Jewish background, includes the scriptures of the past Judaistic heritage, that is to say the Old Testament, which also carries exclusive texts derived from times of persecution. But Judaism and Christianity also contain an inclusive theology. Judaism understands that there is one God who is Creator of, and who cares for, the entire universe and all people. Christianity understands that Jesus Christ came for the sake of all people. This can be interpreted in two ways, either that all must give their allegiance to Jesus Christ, or that God shows the same concern for all people, whatever their beliefs.

The insistence of Christianity on the importance of evangelism and proselytism has been criticised by the Indian theologian D.T. Niles, who said, 'The problem is that we are so busy wanting to populate heaven that we forget to get on with the business of the Kingdom' (quoted by D. Preman Niles 2004:180). The understanding of many Christians that it is their duty to convert everyone discourages them from even considering the possibility that other religions have any validity.

Reading the scriptures in a fundamentalist way and accepting only a literal meaning can give rise to intolerance. For example, the Old Testament texts about idol worship, taken out of the original context and interpreted as literal truth for the present time and circumstance, can lead to attempts to destroy the religion of others, to desecration of temples, and damage to sacred items that are sacred to Hindus. There is a frequently voiced Christian concern that 'we cannot pray with idol worshippers' nor with those who are thought to worship 'other gods'. Such assertions ignore the contradiction for a religion that proclaims there is only one God.

Christianity is also built on the concept, inherited from Judaism, that God takes the initiative in seeking people. This developed from Jews' self-understanding that God had chosen them, a concept that is present through the stories of Abraham and continues on throughout the two Testaments. A feeling of being chosen can, unfortunately, easily spill over into a sense of exclusiveness.

## Guidance from scripture

This paper approaches the Bible with the intention of opening up ways to understand the whole overall message of the Christian and Judaic scriptures. This is done in the hope of making room for the Spirit of God to reveal new interpretations for the circumstances of the present time and our context in Fiji, and of encouraging Christians to have respect for beliefs that differ from their own. It is important to try to focus on the Bible as a whole, and to refrain from building positions based on isolated verses; nevertheless, there will be quotations



of some relevant verses. There is always a temptation to use the Bible to prove one's own ideas, rather than being open to what God is revealing through the text and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Christians believe that the Holy Spirit of God inspired the whole of the Bible. This can be interpreted as meaning that every word is infallible and must be understood literally. Alternatively, account can be taken of the human element, the human vehicle of transmission, and the varying contexts in which the messages were received. This second view allows for the very different circumstances of the present time, leading to deeper understanding and interpretation relevant for today with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. 'The Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything' (John 14:26). In 1 Corinthians 13:12 Paul admits, 'What I know now is only partial'. We none of us has full knowledge. The words in John 3:8, 'The wind blows wherever it wishes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going', indicate that the Spirit is at work in ways beyond our human understanding.

The Bible contains material gathered together over a very long period of time, and of various types—theologies, histories, poetry, devotional material, drama, ancient legends and stories, and writings that seek to foretell the future. During the many centuries from which this material is drawn, the people whose collected ideas and theologies are contained in the Bible were affected by changing circumstances and contexts in which they lived.

The Old Testament writings and traditions developed as the Hebrew people moved from a nomadic, herding life to an agricultural culture, finding themselves among a people whose religion was different, and whose understanding of God was derived from the fertility beliefs common to many agricultural peoples. During the 2000 years between the time of Abraham and Christ they suffered slavery, exile and political turmoil, as well as times of peace and prosperity. Their concept of God and their understanding of themselves in relation to God were unique, and these ideas together with the circumstances of their history

are reflected in their writings. The New Testament writings also arose out of the particular contexts the Christians faced, and were written in response to the circumstances surrounding them. The letters of Paul and other early Christians addressed particular problems and the needs of the early Church. The Gospels were written as theological reflections of the early Church about Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection. They were written some decades after the events they record. 'The circumstances in which the tradition about Jesus was preserved exercised a strong selective influence upon the character of what was preserved', as D.E. Nineham points out in his commentary on the Gospel of Mark. 'What the Gospels give us, inextricably fused together in a single picture, is the historic Jesus and the Church's reactions to, and understanding of, him as they developed over half a century or more' (Nineham, 1963:20). The Gospel accounts are interpretations rather than exact reports of Jesus' words and actions.

The Bible begins with the understanding that God is the Creator of the whole universe, of everything that exists, and the basic assumption of the Bible is that there is only one God who creates and provides for all people no matter how adequate or inadequate their understanding of God is. As the prophet Malachi said, 'The LORD is mighty even outside the land of Israel' (Malachi 1:5b).

The story in Genesis chapter 3 that seeks to explain the alienation of humanity from God is applicable to all people, and the first agreement or covenant between God and people, at the conclusion of the story of the flood, is universal and goes beyond humanity to include all living things. 'I promise that . . . never again will a flood destroy the earth . . . When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings' (Genesis 9:11, 16-17).

The four Gospels in the Bible are the focal point for Christians because each portrays a picture of Jesus Christ. Each Gospel was written in the context of a particular group of Christians; for example, Luke





was written with a gentile, non-Jewish readership in mind. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke have a certain amount of material in common, which is not shared with the Gospel of John. Evidently they used the same sources of material. Mark, Matthew and Luke focus on the humanity of Jesus as teacher, story-teller, healer, someone with deep compassion for the marginalized and underprivileged, someone who enjoys life, making it his task to help others to enjoy life too. He is the initiator of the Kingdom of God, and is shown as a man who lived a God-centred life. Luke, in particular, emphasises Jesus' frequent recourse to prayer. The Jesus of these first three Gospels challenges people to live similar God-centred lives in order to be part of the Kingdom of God as it is becoming present in the world. These Gospels tell us how Jesus Christ lived out his life on earth making visible his experience of God as a compassionate, loving and forgiving Father (Barr, 2003:4).

In contrast, the Gospel of John has a different emphasis. It interprets the meaning of Jesus Christ's life and teachings, and his death and resurrection, from the perspective of Christ's divinity. In this Gospel, Jesus refers to himself as 'Son of God' and the accusation of the crowds when he was on trial before Pilate was 'he claimed to be the Son of God' (John 19:7; see also John 3:18; 5:25; 10:36; 11:4). The Gospel of John indicates that it was written to bring people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:31). When, in this Gospel, Jesus declares 'I am the Bread of Life' and other similar sayings, the wording is a formula that indicates divinity. The 'I am' sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John describe Christ in relation to people. They show the writer's understanding that Jesus Christ has the life-giving power of God the Creator. The ancient Judaic name for God was YAHWEH, which is difficult to translate exactly but has the meaning 'I am who I am' (Exodus 3:14). Verses in the Gospel of John where Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life. No one goes to the Father except by me' (John 14:6), and other statements by or about Jesus, are claims of faith, valid and true for Christians. They are not intended to be used to exclude others from God's grace. When considering the claims that Jesus is the 'only way' it is important to remember that the early Christians

were under attack from the Jewish authorities. For example: 'in all the world there is no one else whom God has given who can save us' (Acts 4:12) was spoken by Peter when on trial before the most senior Jewish leaders. Later there was persecution by the Roman authorities. It is understandable that they made claims for Jesus Christ that Jesus did not make for himself. When such statements as 'Salvation is to be found through him alone' (Acts 4:12) are claimed to be absolute truth, then it is that the exclusion of, and intolerance of, others result. Salvation belongs to God, not to us.

'Christian theology should allow God to be God; it should not own God, as we own a piece of private property. We cannot fence God in and say "Well, if you want to know God, come through this gate." We do not own God; God owns us, and God owns the whole creation. This is the message of the Bible', as S. Wesley Ariarajah explains (1985:11). The World Council of Churches booklet on dialogue with other religions says, 'Salvation belongs to God. We therefore dare not stand in judgement of others. While witnessing to our own faith, we seek to understand the ways in which God intends to bring God's purposes to their fulfilment' (WCC, 2003:9). As the hymn of praise in Paul's letter to the Romans says, 'How great are God's riches! How deep are his wisdom and knowledge! Who can explain his decisions? Who can understand his ways? As the scripture says, "Who knows the mind of the Lord? Who is able to give him advice?"' (Romans 11:33; Isaiah 55:8). Some Christian teachings suggest that salvation means certitude and control, rather than surrender in trust to a compassionate Father, as Fr Barr points out (2003:5-6). Absolute truth is beyond human grasp. Some argue that their claims to absolute truth are based on revelation given by God, and no doubt they are, but does this mean that God withholds revelation from others? People of other faiths give witness to their encounters with the living God, and they too receive gifts of revelation. The World Council of Churches consultation in Baar, Switzerland in 1990 stated that 'people have at all times and in all places responded to the presence and activity of God among them'. The consultation report explained, 'the plurality of religious traditions is the result of both the manifold ways in which God is revealed to



peoples and nations, as well as the manifestation of the richness and diversity of humankind' and affirmed 'that God has been present in their seeking and finding. Where there is truth and wisdom in their teachings, and love and holiness in their living, this, like any wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, love and holiness that is found among us, is the gift of the Holy Spirit' (WCC, 1998). As Paul wrote in his letter to the Galatians, 'the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control' (Galatians 5:22).

The texts about idols and idol worship in the Old Testament arose out of the context of the fertility religion of the people of the land into which the Hebrew people were moving. The instructions forbidding idol worship are included with other commandments that are no longer valid or obeyed, such as, 'Do not plant two kinds of seeds in the same field. Do not wear clothes made of two kinds of material' (Leviticus 19:19). Christians need to learn what the images used by Hindus signify for Hindus, instead of condemning something about which they have little understanding. There are many portrayals of the Divine in Hinduism, and there are many different descriptions, or word-pictures of God, in the Bible. All are different ways in which humans attempt to describe the mystery of God.

The Judaic and Christian understanding that they have a special relationship with God leads some Christians to reject the validity of any other religion, but it raises the question: Should this special relationship preclude God from having a special relationship with others also? There are passages in the Old Testament prophetic writings which show that God does have a relationship with others, such as Amos chapter 1, where the prophet says that God is angry that the nations surrounding Israel had broken their relationship with God. Also in Amos, 'The Lord says, "People of Israel, I think as much of the people of Sudan as I do of you. I brought the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir, just as I brought you from Egypt"' (Amos 9:7). Isaiah writes that Cyrus, the Persian king, is an instrument of God to rescue the people (Isaiah 19:21, 23-25). S. Wesley Ariarajah reminds us

that 'Israel kept the concept of chosenness within God's universal relationship with all nations' (1985:9).

All through the Bible we can find examples of inclusiveness to balance the exclusive claims, and we find teaching that specifically shows that God has control over all nations, and includes all people in his care and concern. The well known story of Jonah, who refused to deliver God's message to the city of Nineveh because he considered the people to be heathen and unbelieving, is one example. 'The Lord Almighty will prepare a banquet for all the nations of the world . . . He will wipe away the tears from everyone's eyes' (Isaiah 25:6-8) is another example. The Gospels give a clear picture of the inclusiveness of Jesus, who treated everyone on the same basis, as having the same value before God, even those who were not Jews (Matthew 8:5-13; 15:21-28). The teaching of Jesus concentrates on God, and values of the Kingdom of God and a way of life that will bring peace. The teaching of the early Christians became less centred on God and more centred on the person of Jesus. For Christians, the teaching of Jesus to be found in the Gospels should take precedence in seeking to understand the will of God.

### Promotion of religious tolerance

National reconciliation in Fiji requires efforts to build religious tolerance. Instead of trying to achieve unity through uniformity, the aim should be to find the harmony of difference. The tool for achieving harmony, which involves understanding and respect, is to be found in our culture. Talanoa, telling our stories, discussion and dialogue—these are our heritage and a mechanism that will promote tolerance and reconciliation. Dialogue is essential in building a healthy society. A society without dialogue, without freedom of expression, without freedom to be different, and where one pattern is imposed on all is an oppressed society. Oppression leads to violence. Humans are naturally diverse. Our Creator ensures that every person is unique. Our diversity is expressed in our identity; and religious diversity, both between different



religions and within each faith tradition, is an aspect of the Creator's will for humanity.

The Bible is full of dialogue. It is the story of the interchange between God and humans. From the beginning when God converses with the two people in the Garden of Eden right through the history of Israel, God and humans are engaged in a relationship of dialogue. The prophetic writings are full of what 'the Lord says'. Jesus engaged in dialogue with the Pharisees, both individuals like Nicodemus, and in groups (e.g. John 3:1–21; Mark 7:1–13; Luke 14:1–24). We read in the Acts of the Apostles that Paul was willing to spend time, for example in Athens (Acts 17:16–34), in discussion and dialogue.

Interfaith Search Fiji has a pattern of inter-religious dialogue that brings together people from different religious groups to share. In dialogue, questions are asked, responses heard, points argued, but there is no imposing on others of any opinions. It requires humility and patience. Dialogue allows space for others, it strengthens identity and supports differences, thus it prevents syncretism. Syncretism is the attempt to combine different teachings and practices in order to make one religion. Syncretism denies diversity and the 'dignity of difference', to use the phrase of Jonathan Sacks (2002). Acknowledgement of the commonalities in religions is to be set beside the acceptance of the differences. Respect that gives dignity to those who are different is an attitude, a way of life to be cultivated. Jesus Christ's disappointment with the Pharisees was because of their exclusivity and their refusal to accept others different from themselves. Jesus was always ready to engage in conversation, to listen to others, and to accept others. Dialogue is more than discovering and learning about the other, it is meeting person to person and building meaningful relationships, which in turn will cement the fabric of society into a peaceful whole.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Capell, in his dictionary of Fijian (1968), records 'a stranger visitor; a pilgrim' for the meaning of *vulagi*. In certain contexts, it may imply 'a foreigner' or 'a guest'.

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## Book Review

*Axis of Peace, Christian Faith in Times of Violence and War*

by S. Wesley Ariarajah.

Risk Book, WCC publications, Geneva, 2004

*Reviewed by Aisake Casimira*

The moral and spiritual issues involved in globalization are among the most important we must face this century if we are to enhance human dignity and improve the chances of peace. When people become anxious and uncertain, as we are now due to the increasing fluidity of our existence, it creates fear, fear leads to anger and anger breeds violence. And violence, when combined with religious extremism, becomes a deadly reality.

The juxtaposition of good and evil, harmony and conflict, global peace and holy war, are to me, fitting metaphors for this new century. We have acquired fateful powers; we can heal or harm, mend or destroy on a scale unimaginable to previous generations. This is the frightening environment in which the author rooted his reflections on violence, war and peace. The only effective antidote to violence and war is, as the author believes, "dialogue" or in Jonathan Sack's words "conversation and conciliation"<sup>1</sup>. This is a very crucial issue not only between and within the Christian Churches but also for inter-faith dialogue initiatives between the world's great religions. It is about speaking our fears and listening to the fears of others. And in the sharing of our vulnerabilities, we discover a genesis of hope. The added worry is that dialogue, the heart beat of democratic politics, seems to be dying and with it the chances for civic and national peace.<sup>2</sup>

In *Axis for Peace*, the author declares that he is against war because





it brings untold suffering on innocent people, especially children as they will bear the psychological and often physical scars for the rest of their lives. If there is another way of resolving conflicts, the author urges us to pursue it.<sup>3</sup>

It seems to me that the book is as much a deep personal self-reflection as it is a valuable guide to Christians around the world. Especially in their struggle to make sense of what is happening around them, and most especially in an environment of violent conflicts and wars. What makes the present world context much more disconcerting is that violence can be initiated, planned and executed without warning. The perpetrator(s) of violence is not seen or known. The technology used is simple everyday gadgets like the telephone and cell phones, and the target can be anything from a bus, airplane, car, and building to a remote island.

Previously, our ethics were defined by the proximity of people and their environment. Now it is increasingly difficult to do so when confronted by the unknown and the invisible; when our immediate environment is the television, bringing to us images and stories of people whom we may never meet or places that we may never visit. But what it does is overwhelm us with so much information and, consequently, creates an 'emotional overload' that our responses are either a 'shrug of the shoulders' or fanaticism. With reference however to the construction of our ethics - what are our points of reference? How do we respond when what we see, hear and read are 'impersonal images' of people and places elsewhere? In this regard this book offers a guide and searching framework enabling us to do this.

While the theory of a 'just war' is inadequate as a guide to how we respond to war and violent conflict in our modern times, it is unwise to completely dismiss it as archaic and irrelevant. The author, in fact, noted that some of the principles are still relevant and in fact, underpin some of the treaties governing war and conflict.<sup>4</sup> But having said that, the author also explains why it has become irrelevant in so many areas.<sup>5</sup> The reasons are worth reading and discussing. What is clear is the need

to comprehensively review the 'just war' theory and amend some of the principles. In light of this, the author suggests that a new approach to resolving conflict is needed. Citing some of the world's great religions and figures of the recent past, the author highlights the long pacifist tradition within the religions as a possible source for developing this approach.<sup>6</sup>

What is also evident, on a global scale regarding international relations between nations, is the need to develop a global moral or ethical framework. This is because if we fail to genuinely make the effort to understand the root causes of aggression and conflict, and the environment that makes people vulnerable to the cruel forces of nature, violence will, in the midst of great advances, characterize this century.

Hence, some writers and commentators point to the need for greater investment in education, health, and welfare programmes in poor countries to ensure that terrorism does not happen again. Jared Diamond, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, in an article entitled *Why we must feed the Hands that Could Bite Us*, believes that international terrorism feeds on poverty and hopelessness and these must be addressed. He suggested three strategies: providing healthcare, supporting family planning and addressing chronic environmental problems.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, writers, such as Gregory Clark, believe that pumping more aid into poor countries will not solve the terrorism problem:

If people in the Third World want to use force against their governments or the West that is because of perceived injustice. Large outpourings of aid will just add to the long history of aid waste and corruption... terrorists attacks will continue as long as the United States continues its overseas 'meddling' and its hypocritical support of oppressive regimes.<sup>8</sup>

But regardless of the pros and cons of the foreign aid debate or the strategies recommended, one thing is clear: there must be a universal moral framework or in Peter Singer's words a 'global ethic' or as



Jonathan Sacks suggests 'a global covenant'<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the author, while well aware of the need for a global ethic or covenant, presents three, if you like, guiding principles to the suggested global endeavour. *Axis for Peace*<sup>11</sup> is the author's contribution. In fact, as the author notes, it is a specific counter alternative to the axis of evil proposed by President George Bush during the Iraq war controversy. Yet, it has global significance. Justice, reconciliation and non-violence are principles that are, at the same time, intrinsic to most great world religions.

Great responsibility, then, lies with the religions. Unexpectedly, they emerge in this century as key forces in a global age. Religion can be a source of discord and can also be a form of conflict resolution. We are familiar with the former. The latter is far too little tried. Yet it is here that that hope must lie if we are to create a human solidarity strong enough to bear the strains that lie ahead. The great faiths must now become an active force for peace and for the justice and compassion on which peace ultimately depends.

This will require great courage, and perhaps something more than courage: a candid admission that, more than at any time in the past, we need to search – each faith in its own way – for a way of living with, and acknowledging the integrity of those who are not of one's faith. When religion is invoked as a justification for conflict, religious voices must be raised in protest. Religious voices must withhold the robe of sanctity when religion is sought as a cloak for violence and bloodshed. If religion is enlisted in the cause of war, there must be an equal and contrasting voice in the name of peace.

This book, is well-written, simple, practical and full of realism, is a must read for Christians, and indeed, anyone who is concerned not only about what is happening in our world but also concerned about our responsibility to help build a better world. But, as the author notes, governments cannot bring about the desired changes. Instead, the people must bring about the changes, one small step at a time. The goal is to transform the culture of violence to a culture of peace and nonviolence.<sup>12</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*. How to avoid the clash of civilization, Continuum, New York, 2002, pg2.

<sup>2</sup> A classic example was the unilateral decision by the US and her so-called 'Coalition of the Willing' to invade Iraq without a UN Security Council approval. Diplomatic processes, involving dialogue and negotiations, are increasingly seen as irrelevant to resolving conflicts and bridging polarized positions.

<sup>3</sup> S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Axis of Peace*, Christian Faith in Times of Violence and War, Risk Book, WCC publications, Geneva, 2004, pg7

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, pp23-24

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, pp28-30

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, pp30-36

<sup>7</sup> Jared Diamond, *Why Must We Feed the Hands That Could Bite Us*, Washington Post, January 13, 2002. Other influential world figures expressed a similar view: from Kofi Annan, Gordon Brown (British Chancellor of the Exchequer) to James Wolfensohn (President of the World Bank) called for increases in foreign aid, calling it an insurance policy against future terrorism.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Clark, *More aid, more regrets later*, Japan Times, January 22, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> The first edition, published in 2002 and the revised edition carries the title 'One World: the ethics of globalisation' (Peter Singer, *One World: the ethics of globalisation*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2004). He examines humanity's obligations towards climate change, foreign aid, the World Trade Organisation and United Nations and asked us what a global ethic could mean when addressing these issues.

<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Dignity of Difference*. How to avoid the clash of civilization, Continuum, New York, 2002, pg205

<sup>11</sup> In pages 111-37, the author, basing on the Bible and theology, discusses in detail what the principles mean and their implications on social, political and economic relationships. (S. Wesley Ariarajah, *Axis of Peace*, Christian Faith in times of Violence and War, Risk Book, WCC publications, Geneva, 2004, pp111-37)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, pp136-37



## Book Review

*One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church.*

Edited by Tamara Grdzeldze, Faith and Order Paper No. 197.

Geneva: WCC.

*Reviewed by Mercy Ah Siu-Maliko*

One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic: Ecumenical Reflections on the Church presents the continued dialogues facilitated by Faith and Order on the nature and mission of the church. The chapters that make up this magnificent piece of work examine in depth issues of the sacramentality, authority and ordained ministry from various denominational perspectives. They open up new ecumenical alternatives of understanding differences in the hope of maintaining convergence through actions. This is an important contribution to enriching ecumenical and theological reflections among churches. It brings on board opportunities to examine sensitive issues pertaining to denominational doctrines and practices. It is an on going discussion that requires openness and honest sharing in the spirit of love and fellowship. A significant input to fostering critical understanding among men and women in the community of faith.

### Does the church have a sacramental nature?

Perhaps this is a fairly new question in the ecumenical dialogue. The church has always been regarded as a sacrament due to its role as the agent of salvation. The multiple perspectives in which the question is addressed from makes it even more convincing that the church indeed has a sacramental nature. More so, the church is also seen as a sign and instrument of salvation. And this sacramental nature of the church is lived out in the ordinary lives of Christians in the world (p.87).

## Authority and Authoritative Teaching in the Church.

A discussion of this issue involves an analysis of the reality in which the church lives out its life and mission in the world. With the multiple factors of globalization and secularization influencing the mission of the church, it is appropriate to re-examine the authenticity of authority and authoritative teaching in the church to ensure that it is connected to the authority of Christ and not of the world.

## Ministry and Ordination in the Community of Women and Men in the Church

The inclusion of this section highlights a crucial issue (women's ordination) that was barely mentioned in the BEM document. Women's service and ordination are issues that the church today find inevitable, as they contribute a significant part in authenticating its mission. Women are no longer a shadow identity but significant role models of discipleship. It poses an essential challenge to churches who still deny women the calling to ordination. It is a prophetic voice that calls churches to live out the biblical truth of men and women being created in the image of God. The Orthodox stand on the issue of ordination represents the ideas of conservative churches that encourage false consciousness among women as a way of legitimizing male authority.



## Book Review

*Worship Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications.*  
Faith and Order Paper No. 194. Ed. by T.F.Best & D.Heller.  
Geneva: WCC, 2004.

*Reviewed by Kafoa Solomone*

This is a project of the Faith and Order Commission of the WCC. The book is a compilation of the churches stated understandings of the nature of worship. It is divided into three parts. The first part presents the churches views on what they do when they worship. This is by far the longest part of the book – more than two hundred pages. The second part is the shortest, with only two articles reflecting on the ecumenical aspect of worship from the Eastern Orthodox and from Western Christianity. The third part of about seventy pages is made up of overviews and analysis of the liturgy from both the East and the West.

This book gives us a comprehensive look into the different understanding and practices of worship in most of the member churches of WCC. Just about every denominational tradition's understanding of public worship or liturgy is represented in this book. It is wide ranging in its coverage of the main traditions within the Christian churches. What is more, it is the churches' views that their representatives describe for the reader. This is one of the strengths of this book. The editors have done a good job of bringing to our attention the wide variety of understanding of what liturgy or public worship is. The different articles on what the liturgy is vary in length, style, and profundity. Some are simple narrative of ordinary pastors; others tend more to the academic, while still others are more of a spiritual witness. From these accounts one can see the rich variety of liturgical practices

and their underlying bases. From the mystical elaborate structured ritual of the orthodox churches, seen for example in the Armenian, Syriac, Coptic, and Byzantine churches, to the simple 'direct access to God' upon waiting for God with an emphasis on the inner reality typical of the Quakers, the non-credal, non-liturgical Brethren or the nonconformist free church traditions.

For me this is the most interesting part of the book. The variety of understanding and practices makes for an interesting reading. It is very informative and one can be enriched by learning from all these churches and their practices.

The analytical part of the book looks at ecumenical worship with this variety of practices and understanding of worship. Ecumenical worship is defined as what the different traditions do when they come together to worship. It is a 'constructed worship' that does not belong to any one tradition in particular. But if the liturgy is "the fullest expression of the church" in the understanding of the Orthodox, and that the eucharist is the liturgical act par excellence, it is hardly surprising that they are uncomfortable with the mostly Western organised ecumenical liturgy that lacks the grandeur of churches and rituals expressing the glory of God in the Orthodox understanding.

The analysis points to the challenges and the hopes of the ecumenical efforts in the area of worship. It is the common interest of churches that the liturgy or worship is a vital part of what it means to be Church or Christian. All the papers acknowledge the fact.

It is hope for the churches that seems to be at the heart of this project. Expressed by one of the analysts of the texts, "that churches may enrich one another in understanding and shaping worship so that its witness to the gospel may be fuller and more complete."

This volume is for every interested person. For the liturgist, the theological student, the ecumenist, the parish pastor and the parishioner. All will benefit from this book.





# Pacific Journal of Theology

## Policy Statement

The Pacific Journal of Theology is published twice yearly by the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools. It seeks to stimulate theological thinking and writing by Christians living in or familiar with the South Pacific, and to share these reflections with church and theological education communities, and with all who want to be challenged to reflect critically on their faith in changing times. Opinions and claims made by contributors to the Journal are solely those of the authors, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board or the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools.

The Editorial Board welcomes various kinds of writing which express an emerging Pacific theology. These may include:

- ◆ Original articles in the theological disciplines;
- ◆ Articles relating theological thinking to Pacific cultures, contemporary issues, and other academic disciplines;
- ◆ Helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational);
- ◆ Artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music);
- ◆ Notes and reviews of books which are relevant for Pacific Christians;
- ◆ Information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.

The Editorial Board will consider for publication all manuscripts of scholarly standard and in keeping with the overall policy of this Journal. It is recommended that articles should be approximately 4,320 words long. The Editorial Board reserves the right to accept or reject, and to edit all articles submitted for publication. Poetry, photographs, black and white drawings are also welcome. Articles should be clearly typed in double spacing on one side of the paper only. Any sources quoted or paraphrased should be listed in endnotes and a bibliography at the end of the article, including author, title, city, publisher and date of publication. Please include brief autobiographical data.

## Language

The Editorial Board will accept articles in French and Pacific languages with an abstract in English language.



# South Pacific Association of Theological Schools

*P.O. Box 2426. Government Buildings, Suva, Fiji.*

*(Tel. 679) 330-3924; Fax (679) 330-7005; email: spatsfi@connect.com.fj*

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